THE TWO MISS JEFFREYS

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NOTHING has surprised me more than the kind welcome given to these simple stories. It has proved to me that many hearts are responsive to commonplace joys and sorrows, finding in them, doubtless, some parallel to their own. In looking back on the record of a long life, which though uneventful in the sense that it has contained no tragedies, but has been rich in experiences common to all, I find that there is much still remaining to be set down, without giving offence to any. I have already dealt at some length with my old neighbours in Faulds, though many a story of that dear place yet remains to be told. I have also set down some part of my experiences of London life, which has commended itself least to my critics, though many

plain folk have not hesitated to say that they found some pleasure in their perusal.

As I have been asked to give some further leaves from my old note-book in these pages, I have thought that two parts of my life as a younger man I have scarcely touched upon at all, though they are rich in memories. I refer to my student days in Edinburgh, and also to the years I spent thereafter in the lawyers' office in Castle Street, scarce a stone's-throw from the town dwelling of Sir Walter Scott.

My grandfather being a person of substance, and well known in certain circles in Edinburgh, was very particular in his choice of "a man of business," in which terms lawyers are invariably referred to in the Dale. His own legal advisers, who had managed his father's affairs, held office in York Place, but my grandfather did not article me to them because they were simple solicitors, and there was not a W.S. in the firm. As he had ambitions for me, and had even in visions beheld me an advocate with chances of a judgeship, it was his interest to place me with a firm who would be of the greatest use to me. In this

he was aided by the Laird of Inneshall, father of Mr. Claude Innes, of whom I have already given some account, and as a great personal favour to him (for it was a most exclusive firm, whose premiums were prohibitive except to the rich) I was admitted to the office of Messrs. Wedderburn, Chisholm, and Wedderburn, W.S., of Castle Street, with whom the legal affairs of Inneshall had been lodged for over a century. Needless to say, they were a very old-established firm, with a long record of honourable traditions, connected with the very best Scottish families by close ties. Only those who have had an experience similar to mine will be able fully to understand the lines upon which that great business was conducted, the strict etiquette, the dignified reticence and absolute faithfulness displayed wherever their clients' interests were concerned. They tell me the race is extinct, that it was never found save in Edinburgh in the first half of the century, and that a new and flippant order of "men of business" has arisen, who laugh to scorn the traditions and methods of these old fossils. But this by the way, and I am very loth to believe it. I think I have elsewhere

mentioned that from my stool in one of the Castle Street windows of the office (the others faced Charlotte Square) it was my privilege often to watch old Doctor John Brown, the creator of Pet Marjorie and Rab and his friends, take his daily walk between his house in Rutland Street and the north side of the town. Sometimes he was alone, but oftener he had a friend with him, one of the older generation, scarcely less distinguished than himself—Ayton, "Christopher North," the genial "Delta." I have seen them all, and I am a better man to-day for having seen them, though I never had speech with any one of them. In all my experience of men and things I have never met any who awakened in me that intense feeling of reverence, almost amounting no awe, with which I used to regard these men. They seemed to dwell apart, to be above the common herd; they were so simple, unconscious, and sincere; they lived the literary life, but had not its jargon on their tongues. They probed to the heart of things, knew nature's secrets and all the conflicting elements of human life, and they wrote of it all so tenderly, and with that inimitable touch of

which the younger generation somehow have lost grip. But I must not here linger, since it is a story I have been desired to tell. Many came within my ken during the years of my Edinburgh life. The minister's study, the doctor's consulting-room, the lawyer's private room—in these the veil is lifted from human motive and life.

During the first year of my office life I was of necessity kept on the outside, learning the clerical drudgery of the desk—and dry enough I found it in all conscience, though I tried to do my duty, so that I might bring no shame on my grandfather, nor upon the Laird who had so kindly stood sponsor for me.

The head of our firm at that time was Mr. James Wedderburn, one of the famous names of the Edinburgh Parliament House. He was a very reserved, grave, austere man, who took a pardonable pride in his own name and the honour of the house with which he was connected. There were other two partners, younger men, one his own nephew; but Mr. James always saw important clients himself. He had very little to say at any time to his subordinates. I suppose

I was twelve months in the office before he ever addressed a single remark to me, or seemed in any way cognisant of my existence. But I learned afterwards that he had had his eye on me all along, and that he had not failed to mark in me certain characteristics which might be creditable enough, but were not likely to go to the making of a good hard-headed man of business. When I thought of James Wedderburn at all in these days, it was only to misjudge him, and I even had a nickname for him, which I will not here set down, though he got to know of it before our acquaintance ceased, and it amused him mightily. I was convinced that his heart was made of parchment as tough as any he wrote his deeds on, which only showed how little penetration I possessed, since I lived to prove that a tenderer heart than James Wedderburn's never beat in human bosom. One day, in the month of August, I was surprised to receive a summons to Mr. Wedderburn's room. It was a holiday month, and the other two partners were absent, also the managing clerk. Mr. Wedderburn himself always remained in town in August, taking

September for his holiday month. As for me, I took my holiday when I could get it, and seeing I had every Saturday to Monday at "The Byres" I was not badly off.

I obeyed my superior's summons at once. I think I see him yet, standing on the Turkey rug before the fireplace, his tall, spare, gaunt figure drawn to its full height, his thin, large-featured face wearing a troubled look, his piercing eyes seeking my face restlessly, as he pushed his long fingers through his iron-grey hair. He wore a high collar and a very stiffly-folded stock, which gave him the appearance of holding his head higher than most men.

"Good-day, Lyall," he said; "I have had something to trouble me this morning—something I wish to tell you about, since I think I can trust you to execute a piece of delicate and rather painful business for me."

"Yes, sir, whatever you wish me to do I shall do to the utmost of my ability."

"Sit down, and I will explain the matter to you," he said, as he moved back to his desk and, sitting down, laid his hand on a great mass of

papers. "I will be as brief as possible. A mining concern in which we advised a number of our clients to invest has turned out disastrously. It involves a number who will scarcely feel the loss; but, on the other hand, a good many to whom it will be a serious thing. One or two will be despoiled of their all. It is of those, particularly two maiden ladies, of whom I wish to speak."

"Yes, sir," I said respectfully, as he hesitated a moment, as if waiting for me to speak, which, however, was not the case. He was simply absorbed for the moment in his own troubled thoughts.

"If Mr. Tom or Mr. Chisholm had been here, or even John Grieve, I should not have sent for you. Some one must see those ladies at once in order to get certain papers from them. The papers cannot be got without telling them what has happened. It is a task I do not care about. I must ask you to do it."

I listened to him in surprise, secretly touched, but I never spoke a word.

"You may know them, the two Miss Jeffreys

—they come here sometimes; they live at 42, India Street, one stair up."

"I don't think I know the ladies, sir, but I can easily find them. What am I to say to them?"

"Say, oh, what you like, so long as you break the disastrous news to them as gently as possible. God help them! He alone knows what will become of them."

"But, sir," I ventured to say, "perhaps it may be premature to tell them all. Is there no chance of a part at least of the invested money being returned to them?"

"None!" he said, and there was almost a groan in his voice. "It is a catastrophe no man could foresee or avert. The mine is entirely destroyed by floods. Experts give no hope that anything will be recovered from the deluge. This is not the first I have heard of it, of course, but with the experts' report before me I feel that there is nothing to be done now but inform our clients of their position."

"The Miss Jeffreys have no other means, sir?" I said inquiringly, encouraged to ask

these questions by his entirely frank and friendly attitude towards me.

"None; and we advised them to invest their slender capital in this undertaking because it was prosperous and paid a high dividend. They have been quite gleeful during the last five years over their increased income, though, God knows, I have many a time wondered how they made it cover their expenses. I expect nothing but that you will get a lesson when you go this morning, David Lyall, a lesson in Christian fortitude."

Now this manner of speech was so unlike anything I had ever been led to expect from Mr. James Wedderburn, that I could only wonder in silence.

"You will go down to Miss Jeffreys' now, and tell them what has happened," he said presently, more in his usual manner. "And ask them for all the correspondence they have in their possession relating to Pittendrie, do you hear?"

"Yes, sir." I rose to my feet, and my heart was heavy within me; the task was not one

any man of common feeling could undertake gladly.

"Say what you like to them; you can take the copy of the experts' report in your pocket and tell them, with my sincere and heartfelt sympathy, that I shall be at their service at any time and in any manner they may command. You hardly need to introduce yourself, by the bye; they know your grandfather by repute, and have been interested in you."

So he dismissed me, and I made the best of my way across to India Street. As I went down the steep hill from George Street, I remember still how I was struck by the incomparable beauty of the prospect before me: the gradual slope of the town to the edge of the Forth, where it stretched, blue and shimmering, beneath the August sun—with the rich shores of Fife, "the beggar's mantle fringed with gold," so clearly discernible that I could make out some of the red-roofed cottages nestling about the old harbour of Pettycur. The house I found without difficulty, and in answer to my knock the door was opened to me by Miss Jeffreys

herself. Being obliged to practise the strictest economy, they kept no maid-servant, the rough work of the house being done by a woman who came in for a few hours every morning. Yet truer gentlewomen than these two I have never seen. They belonged to a very old family, the Jeffreys of Pittendrie, in Forfarshire, whose history would make a long story, and one not lacking in tragedy or comedy. I seemed to realize, as I followed Miss Jeffreys into the small, neat, quaint drawing-room, what a difficult task I had to perform. She was dressed for the afternoon in an old silk gown of that now obsolete colour known as puce, a black lace cap trimmed with ribbons of the same hue adorned her grey hair, her thin, characteristic hands were encased in black silk mittens, clasped at the wrists with bracelets woven of hair and set in gold.

"I have come from Mr. James Wedderburn, Miss Jeffreys," I said; "my name is Lyall."

At this her somewhat dignified, expectant look gave way to an expression of real kindliness.

"Oh yes, I have heard of you from Mr. Wedderburn. Of your grandfather I also knew something, and we have some slight acquaintance with Doctor Gourlay, of Faulds."

"Yes, ma'am," I said lamely, and as I noticed the brightness of the look in her keen black eyes I still more heartily loathed my task. "May I ask if your sister is at home?"

"Oh yes, Christina is in. I daresay she will have dressed by this time, and will be looking to our dish of tea, which, when your business is concluded, we shall be pleased if you will drink with us. I will tell my sister you are here."

So saying, she bustled importantly from the room, leaving me in much discomfort. I busied myself regarding the old-fashioned furniture and the extraordinary evidences of feminine industry in the shape of samplers and wool-work cushions of which the room was full. But I was not long left alone. The sisters entered, holding each other by the hand—an extremely pathetic picture—and I saw that the younger, upon whose faded face still lingered signs of early beauty,

was a child in the hands of her sister Anne. But the confidence and love between them was one of the few perfect things I have seen.

"Here is my sister, Mr. Lyall, and now we will not keep you from relating your business. We have known from our uncle, Lord Carabank —doubtless you may have heard the name, famous in the Parliament House in the days of Jeffrey and Cockburn—we have often heard him say that lawyers' time is very valuable, so we are quite ready, if you please."

They seated themselves expectantly, but did not bid me be seated, which just marked the nice distinction they felt between my position and theirs.

"I am come from Mr. Wedderburn's, the bearer of bad news," I said bluntly, and fumbling like any schoolboy with the papers in my pocket. "A great disaster has occurred at the Antibean Mine. The workings have been entirely destroyed by flood, and the worst is feared."

They sat very still for a moment, silent, so did I. I did not expect them to make a noise; they belonged to a race that bears without that,

but I saw the face of Miss Anne grow ashen, and her shrewd mouth contract as if with sudden pain. "The worst! That means, I suppose, that our poor living is gone. If it is so, tell us clear and straight," she said shrilly. "We are only two simple old women, but we can understand a plain statement set before us clearly."

I did the best I could. I read them the experts' report word for word. I answered the questions put to me by Miss Anne straightforwardly, and then, when I saw they comprehended it all, I turned to go. They rose also and faced me with much dignity, restraining themselves, I could see, though they felt the foundation of things slipping from them. Before that unspeakable woe I was dumb, not daring to utter a word of commonplace sympathy, though, God knows, my heart was full enough.

"Tell Mr. Wedderburn we are very much obliged to him," said Miss Anne, "and that when we have taken counsel together we will come to see him. And we thank you kindly

for the trouble and patience you have taken to explain everything to us. We will not forget to mention this courtesy ourselves to Mr. Wedderburn."

Something thick was in my throat. I tried to speak, but it was a moment before my voice answered to my will.

"I see you feel for us, and it is good to see feeling in a young man. In these days many are so flippant. No, we shall not despair; but will remember with the Psalmist that we have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

As I stepped out into the pleasant sunshine again it seemed to me that it but mocked at human care and pain. What more pitiful sight could there be under heaven than these two elderly and helpless women deprived without warning of their means of subsistence? I suddenly bethought myself, as I climbed the steep to Charlotte Square again, that I had forgotten to ask for the Pittendrie papers; but I felt that I could not go back, could not again intrude upon that desolate house.

"It does not greatly matter," my master said to me after he had heard my account of the interview. "Pittendrie is the family estate. It is held now by a ne'er-do-weel cousin, who never expected to have it, and who is making ducks and drakes of the finest property I've ever had through my hands. They are the next-of-kin. Mr. Alexander Jeffreys must be made to support his helpless kinswomen. I will write to him this very night."

There was a long fight over it, but in the end the Laird of Pittendrie was practically coerced into paying his cousins a pound a week. They lived on that, and kept themselves like gentlewomen; but they grew perceptibly aged in the process. I could see the difference in them each month as I took them their cheque.

This was by their own request, and we became very close friends. I wish it were possible for me to write down something of what I saw in that little house, what glory of self-sacrifice, what quiet, cheerful, uncomplaining drudgery, what secret yet often expressed thankfulness to God that their way had been opened up to them even so far.

They were never tired of praising their cousin Pittendrie for his generosity, and they wrote him periodical letters, we knew, which I daresay he threw unread, if not unopened, into the fire. We had not told them of the stiff battle Mr. Wedderburn had before he could screw that microscopic sum out of the spent coffers of Pittendrie.

It was a harmless silence which hurt no one, and made them happier, though Pittendrie, of course, ill deserved the gratitude of these simple and loving hearts. One day, about two years after the destruction of the Antibean Mine, and long after the opinion of the experts had been fully justified, I was sent for to Mr. James's room. I saw at a glance that he was much excited, but it was a pleasurable excitement, which prepared me for good news. "What do you think has happened, Lyall? Nothing short of a God-send. That rascal Pittendrie, in a drunken bout, has jumped his horse over the Linn of Pittendrie, and he's dead, no loss to anybody, the more's the pity; and our wee leddies are now the leddies of Pittendrie. You shall take them the news, David, though I grudge you the job. But it's only fair

that you should have the pleasure of taking the good news as well as the bad."

To this I made no demur; and within half an hour I was at Miss Jeffreys' door. It was early in the day, and they were busy about their household affairs, for which they apologised merrily. I remember yet the quaint figure Miss Anne cut, with her head enveloped in a red cotton duster, and a feather brush in her hand.

"I am sent from Mr. Wedderburn again, Miss Jeffreys," I said, hardly knowing how to tell them; "and this time the news is great and, to us, very gladsome. Mr. Alexander Jeffreys died last night, and you are the ladies of Pittendrie."

Miss Jeffreys sat down, violently trembling.

"What do you say? Do you hear him, Christina? Our poor cousin Alexander, who has been so good to us, is away."

"I never saw him but once, Anne, and then his speech was not for gentlewomen's ears," said Miss Christina. "Perhaps that is why I cannot mourn him as I ought."

"He had a rough way, and did not know how to speak to gentlewomen, I admit; but he has

kept us from the poorhouse, Christina, so I wonder to hear you," said Miss Anne reprovingly; but secretly I admired her sister's candour.

"He had his good points, I doubt not, as well as his bad," I observed, "and he is gone to his account. Did you take notice of what I said? This will make a great change in your circumstances, for Pittendrie now belongs to you, Miss Jeffreys—you and your sister are the sole legatees."

"Oh!" cried Miss Anne, "I cannot take it in. Do you hear, Christina? Mr. Lyall is saying that Pittendrie belongs to us. Do you get a grip of it?"

"Oh yes," said Christina; and her faded face flushed softly. "We shall never be poor any more, and we shall get a new gown at last, for, oh! I am so tired of the old ones."

"You must excuse her, Mr. Lyall," said Miss Anne, with a kind of a gentle tolerance which was inimitable. "She has aye been fond of the pomps and vanities. But Pittendrie ours, did you say? Lord have mercy on us! What will two lone gentlewomen do with it?"

"Dwell at it, Anne!" cried Miss Christina excitedly. "And we shall go in and out the rooms in silk gowns that have not lost their rustle, and sit down to six o'clock dinner, with meat, and maybe port wine to it every day."

"Oh, Christina Jeffreys, do you not think shame? Mr. Lyall will think you have nothing in your heart but meat and drink and raiment."

"Mr. Wedderburn will do himself the pleasure of calling upon you to-morrow morning, Miss Jeffreys, if convenient to you," I said, as I rose to take my leave.

"It will be quite convenient, and tell him that we never will forget that his courtesy has never failed towards us through all our sad ups and downs. Think no more of what my sister said, and I pray you do not tell Mr. Wedderburn. She is but a bairn in some things yet, and it is natural that a bonnie face should give more heed to the things of this world. As for me, I am grateful because we shall be again able to take honest Mary Delgleish into our service, and this time for good. What did I say the first time we met in this house, lad? 'I am an auld woman, an' ye are

but at the outset of life. Maybe you'll remember my words when I am gathered to my folk, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."'"

A FAMILY FEUD

A FAMILY FEUD

MY introduction to the Miss Jeffreys was the means of advancing my interests very considerably with my employers, and Mr. James Wedderburn very often took me with him on confidential business in which he required the help of a clerk. We were all very friendly in the office, and John Grieve, the managing clerk, in no way resented my advancement. He was getting old himself, and his duties were nominal, but he was one of the pillars of the house, and as he had grown grey in its service, so he would remain till the day of his death. Like his master, he belonged to the old order which changes every day. Entirely devoted to the best interests of the firm, which were, of course, identical with those of the clients, he had no ambition beyond them. He was thus entirely free from petty jealousies, which are the curse of many houses where a number of

persons are employed. Of course his own position was assured, nothing could assail or undermine it, therefore he could afford to be generous to those under him. Good old man, much wise advice did he give to me; his words of counsel I remember and cherish to this day.

One day I was called to Mr. James's private room, and bidden prepare at once for a journey.

"I have to go out to Lauder this morning, Lyall, to see Sir John Campbell March, of Balswinton. It's a will business—will take us all day. Send for a cab to be here in twenty minutes; the train leaves at twenty minutes to eleven."

I know not how it is now, but in those days the train service only brought travellers within eight miles of the quaint old-world little town, shut in among its bare hills; the last part of the journey had to be accomplished by coach or on foot. Mr. Wedderburn, however, had telegraphed the time of our arrival, and when we alighted at the station a dog-cart, in charge of a man in livery, awaited us.

It was a winter day, best described perhaps by

the old Scotch word "snell." The roads were hard bound by a grim, black frost, and stray snowflakes were scudding before the bitter north wind, which met us fair in the teeth as we turned up the hilly road to our destination.

"A closed carriage would have been preferable on a day like this," said Mr. Wedderburn, rather irritably, as he put another fold of his neckcloth round his throat, and turned up the collar of his overcoat. "Who ordered this thing to be sent?"

"Her ladyship, sir," answered the man apologetically, touching his hat. Mr. Wedderburn gave a little snort, and climbed to his seat with a very bad grace.

"Just like her," I heard him say under his breath. Then he looked straightly at me and gave a slight smile. "You'll see a bit of tragedy to-day, Lyall, I could almost prophesy. A bitter struggle has been going on here for the last twelve years. I wonder who's going to be the victor. Well, we'll see."

I knew the family name of Campbell March by repute, since Balswinton was not so very far from my own home country, but I was, of course, igno-

rant of their inner affairs, and looked forward with some interest to the events of the day. I was even in these early days a keen student of human nature, and seldom lost any opportunity of prosecuting that study. I counted myself extremely fortunate in having got into the good graces of my principal, who had it in his power to introduce me to many a strange bit of human experience.

Balswinton lay on the near side of Lauder, so that we turned in at the imposing stone gateway without even coming in sight of the town. I have never seen a finer park or more magnificent trees than those surrounding Balswinton. The house itself was insignificant viewed from without, and I was therefore surprised to be ushered into a very spacious hall, from which an imposing staircase ascended to a quaint gallery such as I never had before seen. We were received by an elderly manservant, whom Mr. Wedderburn greeted in the cordial manner of an old friend.

"Well, Bryden, how's Sir John to-day?" he asked, as we stepped into the library.

"He's very low, sir," answered the old man

mournfully. "Dr. Laidlaw says there's nae hope. I'll tell her ladyship you have come."

When we were left alone, Mr. Wedderburn turned to me with a word of explanation.

"Here there is an exemplification of the old adage, 'marry in haste and repent at leisure,' lad," he said quietly. "Twenty years ago there wasn't a finer nor a happier man than my old friend Campbell March. He was a bachelor like myself, and many a happy day we've spent together in this place. Like many another foolish man, he has come to grief on the sea of matrimony. He fell in love, or imagined himself in love, with a young lady he met at a ball in Edinburgh, the daughter of a retired naval man at Trinity; and, in spite of the advice freely bestowed upon him by all of his best friends, myself among them, he married her, five-and-twenty years his junior, and a regular bad lot besides. What has been the result? He's had the whole hungry pack of her relations at Balswinton all these years, eating him out of house and home. He was not a rich man when he married her; she's made him a good deal poorer. There's been

nothing but bickerings and misery all through, and that's what's killed my old friend, who ought to have had twenty years' good life in him yet."

He spoke with a great deal of bitterness, and I observed that the matter was one upon which he felt deeply.

"Is there not an heir, then?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "I don't know whether that would have mended matters or not. The next-of-kin is as fine a young fellow as ever breathed, the son of Sir John's brother, a lieutenant in the 93rd. He's at Edinburgh Castle just now, but though he's in the army, he's not a soldier born; he was made for a country life, and he's the very apple of his uncle's eye."

"He's the heir-at-law, I suppose?" I said inquiringly.

"Well, that's entirely as his uncle pleases; there's no entail, and you will readily understand Lady March's anxiety; of course, she wants Balswinton, so that she may have the whole tribe of her relations and questionable acquaintances to hold high carnival here. But so far, I think, we've outwitted her. Sir John has behaved very

generously to her, and she will have no reason to complain."

At that moment we were interrupted by the opening of the door, and a lady entered. A very cool greeting passed between her and Mr. Wedderburn; of me she took not the smallest notice. She was very handsome; I think I see her still as she stood by the table in her smart tailor-made gown, with its faultless linen collar and cuffs, the severe simplicity of which seemed to accentuate the proud, strong, clear-cut features of her face. She had a great luxuriance of glossy black hair, and straight, strongly marked, black eyebrows, which gave a look of characteristic determination: a very strong-minded woman evidently, and one who would fight for, even if she did not gain, her own ends.

"I was not aware that you were expected, Mr. Wedderburn," she said, in a very disagreeable voice; "your telegram was quite a surprise to me. May I ask what is your business?"

"I am here at Sir John's request, Lady March," answered Mr. Wedderburn, quite courteously, yet with a certain curtness which I well understood.

"It is a long journey to Balswinton, and as I am extremely anxious that we should catch the three o'clock train, I shall be glad to see Sir John without delay."

"He is very ill this morning," she answered sharply, "and as Dr. Laidlaw has not yet been here I don't know that I should be justified in allowing you to go up; he must not on any account be excited; indeed, already his mind is wandering, and he does not know what he is talking about."

"The letter I received this morning, written in his own hand, was perfectly clear and concise," said Mr. Wedderburn calmly. "I hope, for Sir John's sake, that you exaggerate his condition. Will you kindly tell him that I am here?"

I remember how she stood defiantly at the table, while they regarded each other steadfastly without a falter on either side. They were sworn enemies at heart, and had ever been since that memorable day when the marriage settlements of Balswinton were drawn up in the dingy little second-rate drawing-room, in the villa overlooking the Forth. Lady March knew that the keen

eye of the astute lawyer, who seldom made a mistake in his estimate of human nature or human affairs, had read her false nature then like the page of an open book.

"There are things more important in this world than your convenience, Mr. Wedderburn," she said insolently; "and I decline to allow you to see Sir John until the doctor has been here."

"When does he usually make his visit?" he asked.

"When it suits him," she replied; and we only learned long after that on that particular morning a groom had been dispatched to Lauder, to ask Dr. Laidlaw to postpone his visit until the evening, as her ladyship would not be at home.

"As Sir John is so ill, probably he will not be later than one o'clock," said Mr. Wedderburn musingly. "I shall wait till then; after that I shall insist upon seeing Sir John whether you wish it or not, Lady March."

She bit her lip, and sweeping him a little mocking curtsey, she immediately withdrew. It was now within twenty minutes of the hour. Mr. Wedderburn began to pace restlessly up and

down the floor, with his hands crossed behind his back, and his brows sternly knit. I saw that his own thoughts were sufficient for him, and moving to one of the long windows, I interested myself in the magnificent view of the park, through which flowed one of the finest trout-streams of the south country. The twenty minutes slowly passed. Mr. Wedderburn never spoke a word until the deep musical gong of the fine old clock reminded him that the hour had come; then he rang a bell. It was answered at once by Bryden, who I thought seemed nervous and put out.

"I want to see Sir John, Bryden, at once. Can you take me up?"

"I wish I could, Mr. Wedderburn; but I have my orders from her ladyship that no one is to see Sir John without her leave."

"She will not accord it to me, Bryden, so I must go without it. I will relieve you of all responsibility, and find my way to the room myself."

The old man, nervously working his hands together, cast imploring eyes on the lawyer's face.

"Oh, sir, I hope the place winna be put past young Mr. Jervis, and fa' into the hands o' the corbies that are in the house this day."

"Are they all here, Bryden?" asked Mr. Wedderburn, pausing at the door.

"Every man Jack o' them, sir," answered Bryden, with mournful indignation; "and the old Captain drinking Sir John's port as if it were water frae the pump. Oh, there'll be a judgment on them, there's bound to be, if the Lord reigneth."

The extraordinary religious fervour with which the old butler uttered these last words left a strong impression on my mind. I saw in him the personification of absolute devotion to the house he had served from his youth up; it was more than wife or child, meat or drink, to him, and was at once one of the most pathetic and most beautiful things I have ever seen.

"Stay here, Lyall, until I send for you," Mr. Wedderburn said to me, as he closed the door, and I was left to my own reflections. I improved the time by examining the well-filled book-shelves which lined the walls, and found

there so many treasures that I could very well have wished the time to pass but slowly, yet withal I found my thoughts wandering to the upper room. Once or twice I fancied I heard footsteps overhead, and the muffled sound of voices, but I believe it was nothing but imagination, for the old house of Balswinton was well built and deafened, and the carpets of a kind to deaden all sound. I had just settled myself comfortably in a chair, with the autobiography of the Ettrick Shepherd in my hand, when the library door was hastily opened, and Bryden appeared, with visible signs of excitement on his face.

"Will you come upstairs at once, sir? Mr. Wedderburn needs you to witness a deed."

I followed him in haste up the wide staircase and across the quaint gallery to a long corridor, at the further end of which Bryden opened a door. It gave entrance to a large dressing-room. It was in the inner room we found the Laird of Balswinton, propped up in the bed from which he would never rise again. Although he was evidently far spent, his natural courtesy, which

prompted him to accord a welcome even to an obscure stranger, made him give me a cordial good-morning. He was an old man, with thin white hair straggling about his temples, and a worn, sad face stamped with the seal of approaching death. There was no one in the room except the nurse and Mr. Wedderburn. Writing materials lay upon the table at which Mr. Wedderburn sat, near to the bed. He rose at my entrance and glanced straightly at me.

"You are only required to witness this deed before Bryden adds his signature," he said, and I did so without asking a single question. The whole business did not take more than two minutes, and immediately I had performed the small service required of me Mr. Wedderburn told me to go downstairs. As I emerged from the corridor to the gallery, I met Lady March on the stairs. She looked at me with an expression of bitter scorn and hatred, such as I have seldom seen on a human face, and drawing her skirts aside, lest by any chance she should be contaminated by my touch, she suffered me to pass. These mute signs revealed to me the

whole truth of the past twelve years, something of the sordid misery of that loveless and ill-assorted union. I was still pondering upon it when my principal joined me in the library. I saw that he was much upset,—indeed, under the influence of a very strong emotion.

"Put these papers all in the bag, Lyall, and let us get out of this dishonoured house," he said brusquely. "We shall just be in time for the train, I think."

I obeyed him with what haste I could, and when we stepped out into the hall, Bryden, his hands still trembling with excitement, was waiting for us.

"There's lunch in the dining-room, sir. I had no orders, but I saw to it myself. Won't you take a mouthful before you go?"

"It would choke me, Bryden," answered Mr. Wedderburn quickly. "We shall have fifteen minutes or so at the station, long enough to get a mouthful of something at the inn. Good-bye. I doubt Sir John won't last many hours."

"No, sir, the end's near," said the old man, scarcely able to restrain his emotion, as he helped

the lawyer on with his coat. "Just tell me afore you go that everything is right, and that the place will not be put past Mr. Jervis."

Mr. Wedderburn, with a somewhat grim smile, pointed to the brief bag in my hand.

"It's all right, Bryden, as right as I can make it. I hope we may both live to see better days in Balswinton."

With one of those rare touches of kindly and human feeling which I believe was one of the secrets of his great success, he shook Bryden's hand warmly and left the house. I was not surprised that he spoke little to me on the way. I saw that the sorrows of the house we had left lay heavy upon his soul. Snow was now falling thickly; through the noiseless air no sound could be heard, except the rattle of our wheels upon the ice-bound road. Mr. Wedderburn, with his muffler close about his mouth and his back to the storm, never spoke a word. We got a plateful of hot soup at the railway inn, which sent us with better heart on our cold journey, and we arrived in town about darkening. For several days I heard no more of the affairs of Balswinton,

until one morning, as I scanned my newspaper over my solitary breakfast, I saw the death announced of Sir John Campbell March. So it was all over, and I had some natural curiosity regarding the final settlement of affairs. On the day of the funeral I was bidden by Mr. Wedderburn get ready to accompany him out to Balswinton. I do not know why he desired my company; it was simply my duty to obey. At the station we found many mourners going by the same train. Mr. Wedderburn remained at the door of our compartment anxiously looking for some one. At the last moment, almost as the guard's whistle blew, a young man of fine, soldierly figure, though wearing civilian dress, ran along the platform and jumped into the carriage.

"A narrow shave; my cab came a cropper in Cockburn Street, and I had to run for it. Coldish morning, isn't it?" As he spoke he glanced inquiringly at me, yet in quite a friendly manner, which set me at my ease.

"Mr. David Lyall, my confidential clerk—Mr. Campbell March, Laird of Balswinton," said Mr. Wedderburn, and my face flushed at the terms in

which he spoke of me. The young Laird extended his hand in the same friendly manner, and expressed his pleasure at meeting me. He was very fine-looking, and he carried the sure seals of a righteous and noble life on his frank, open, and winning face. I did not wonder that his uncle loved him; he was made to win respect and affection, even from those he met casually. They withdrew into the furthest corner of the compartment, and conversed together in a low voice concerning the affairs of Balswinton. More than once, however, they spoke to me; and there was no desire to conceal their talk from my ears. So we arrived at the little moorland station, where there was no lack of coaches to carry us to the old house. There was no delay when we got there; the funeral cortège started at once for the family burying-ground, which was within the ruined walls of an old chapel situate in the park. I followed at a respectful distance on foot, but returned to the house in case I might be required before the reading of the will, which was of more importance to the living than the sad ceremony in which they had been engaged.

I was surprised at the large number of persons who waited in the library—still further surprised when Mr. Wedderburn bade me join them. And so it came to pass that I was a witness to the strange scene which followed. Lady March was there, strongly supported by her own relatives, and her own man of business, whose real name I will not here set down. He is long since gathered to his fathers, but it may be that some might still recall him to remembrance, and such as he are best forgotten. Mr. Wedderburn, without any preliminaries, made public the last will and testament of the deceased, the document to which he had added a codicil the last day he saw him in life, and which I had witnessed with my own hand. It was a very just will, and generous to the woman who had so poorly kept the vows she had taken to the dead man in the Cathedral of St. Giles, but it willed the place clean away from her, and even desired in the codicil, against which I afterwards learned that Mr. Wedderburn had protested, that she should remove herself and her belongings from Balswinton within one calendar month of Sir John's decease, in order that the

new Laird might take possession without delay. No man envied him as he sat with his true, honest face down bent, because of the unutterable detestation with which his aunt and her tribe regarded him. Scarcely were the last formal words out of Mr. Wedderburn's mouth than she started to her feet, her face white as death, her black eyes gleaming like coals of fire under her forbidding brows.

"That is all very well so far as it goes," she said shrilly. "But something still remains to be said before Mr. Jervis March enters upon his unrighteous possession. I need not here enter into the cruel and wicked pressure that has been brought to bear on my late husband by his legal adviser, who is in the pay of those who wished to wrest my rights from me. Mr. Wedderburn has pursued me with his hatred all through my married life, and tried to poison my husband's mind against me to the last. But he came to himself before he died, and saw his false friend in his true light, and, I am glad to say, lived long enough to repair the injustice done to me. Mr. Menteith, do your duty."

We waited breathless while the other lawyer stepped to the table, and, unfolding a document he held in his hand, made us acquainted with its contents. It was very brief, and entirely reversed the former will, leaving Lady March sole executrix, without so much as leaving a penny or a line of remembrance to the boy who had been as his own son to him. I saw him grow deadly pale and drop his proud young face in his hands. I also saw my chief's face become set like a granite block, and his mouth assumed an expression those who knew him best did not like to see. He rose slowly to his feet, and we waited breathless for what was to come.

"This document, Lady March, will require to be proved. When I left Sir John on the thirteenth of February, he was a dying man; the will which Mr. Menteith now holds in his hands bears date the fifteenth, which was the day he died. I do not believe it is a genuine deed."

At that Menteith got into a great rage, and they began to discuss the matter hotly between them. At this juncture some withdrew, and Mr. Wedderburn signed to me to leave the room.

When I got into the hall I found Jervis March there, and I saw that he had got a terrible blow. There are times when misery forces a man's confidence. I suppose he forgot my obscure position, and only saw in me a sympathetic human creature.

"I've got my marching orders," he said; and I saw that, though he spoke quietly, the life had gone out of him. "If it should be true, it's the death-warrant to my hopes."

"It will go hard with them to prove their case," I said, trying to speak hopefully; but he shook his head.

"For five years I have been engaged to be married," he said then. "If this is true, I shall never be able to marry. How can I, on a lieutenant's pay? So you see what it means to me."

At that moment old Bryden, the butler, came running from his pantry, and seeing his dear young friend's dejection, gripped him by the hand.

"Oh, Mr. Jervis, sir, for God's sake dinna say there's anything wrong. Ye *are* the Laird o'

Balswinton, oor ain Laird, that we hae loved sin. he was a little bairn puin' gowans by the burn. Tell me that the ootlins in there," he added, pointing with a jerk of his thumb towards the library door, " hae gotten their marchin' orders."

I went with haste through the open door, swallowing a lump in my throat, and feeling that as a stranger I had no right to witness that pathetic scene.

The case was carried to the Court of Session. There may be some living yet who remember that great law-suit—March *v.* March and others ; but in the end Jervis won, and the other will was proved a forgery. Lady Campbell March, indeed, overreached herself, and although some in high places intervened to save the old name from being swept through the lowest depths, the law was inexorable, and she had to stand her trial for perjury, and to suffer sentence, too, of three months' imprisonment. At the expiry of it she disappeared abroad with her relatives, and was only heard of each time the handsome jointure, which somewhat crippled the estate, became due. But in spite of his very slender means,

Jervis March was happy with his sweet wife in the house he had loved from his boyhood. And he carried himself nobly in his altered position, and set the example of an honest soul trying to do his duty by God and man. It is not so very many years since he died, full of honour, and is still spoken of with tender affection as "oor ain Laird."

"ACCORDING TO SCOTS LAW"

"ACCORDING TO SCOTS LAW"

SOME of the scenes depicted in these stories I witnessed, and some of them I only had described to me, or heard of indirectly. One morning, soon after the office was opened, and Mr. James Wedderburn had just gone to his room, a cab rattled up to the door, and a young lady alighted, ran up the few steps hurriedly to the door, and entered the outer office.

"I want to see a lawyer," she cried shrilly—"the head of this business—at once."

This unusual request, and the manner of its utterance, diverted the attention of every man among us from our desks. She was a very young creature, not more than three or four and twenty, and it was quite evident that she was distraught. She had a sweet southern accent, and was of more fragile and delicate build than the more robust daughters of our rugged north. One of

the clerks asked her name, but she declined his request.

"Your Mr. Wedderburn would not know me," she answered. "Tell him I am a woman in distress."

To such a message as that, Mr. Wedderburn, in spite of his reputed hardness of heart, did not remain for a moment obdurate. She was immediately admitted to his room, and the door was shut, so that we could see or hear nothing more. As all the facts of that interview were related to me with considerable exactness by my chief, I will simply tell the story in the third person, save at any part in which I was myself involved. Mr. Wedderburn had a large private correspondence, and he was old-fashioned in his custom of opening all his letters with his own hand, though he did not write many. He was sitting ruefully regarding what appeared a larger pile than usual when his new and unexpected client was announced. He wheeled round on his chair, adjusted his heavy gold-rimmed spectacles, and looked at her keenly.

"Good-morning, madam," he said, in his grave,

formal way. "Pray be seated. May I ask your name?"

"My name!" she repeated, with a touch of piteousness. "It is my name I have come about. Until this morning I have called myself Mrs. Hamilton Warre."

"A name unfamiliar in my ears, madam," he replied, still formally. "I see that you are in dire trouble. Pray tell me how I can help you."

"You can set my mind at rest; that is all," she said, and began to remove her gloves with nervous haste. "But first, I suppose, I must tell you something about myself. I am an orphan. My own name was Gertrude King. My father was an officer of the Inland Revenue, my mother a Scotchwoman. We have resided here since his death, eleven years ago, but I was born at Grinstead, in Sussex. Two years ago my mother died too. The meagre pension which sufficed to keep a roof above us died with her. Since then I have earned my living teaching drawing in a school."

"A sad but by no means uncommon story, madam. Pray go on."

"At my mother's death I sold the few things she had left to pay the last expenses, and went into lodgings. I did not care for a very poor locality, though I really could afford nothing more, so I took a very small attic room in a house where there were several other lodgers, chiefly men."

She gave a little gasp, and put her hand to her heart as if some suffocating feeling overpowered her. The lawyer waited sympathetically till she recovered herself.

"I was the only woman in the house but the landlady, who had once known better days, but was kept down by the sordid conditions of her life. I saw little of her, and lived an absolutely solitary life until I made acquaintance accidentally one day with one of the other lodgers, Godfrey Hamilton Warre." She paused again, and already Mr. Wedderburn anticipated the issue of her tale.

"I need not weary you with details," she said, with a wonderful self-control. "Suffice to say we became very friendly, and formed an attachment for one another which ended in a secret

marriage. He was only a medical student, entirely dependent on his father's allowance, and though they were well off, living at Warre Court, in Hampshire, he dared not tell them what he had done. I saw that it would be disastrous for him to reveal our marriage until he had taken his degree; and I loved him so much, I would not have hurt his prospects for the world. I tried to persuade him to wait, but he would not, and we were married. He was going to enter the army, and expected to be sent abroad. He has been at Netley for the last three months, and now he has gone home to Hampshire."

"Leaving you in the meantime alone here," said Mr. Wedderburn, adding another word to the jottings he had taken in his note-book.

"Yes; I did not mind that. I had my work, and I knew his studies had to be finished. I had made up my mind that I must wait till then. Last week he went home; this is the letter I received this morning, the letter which, unless you can help me, has ruined my life and robbed me of my name."

She took it tremblingly from the bosom of her

dress, and leaning back in her chair, closed her eyes while Mr. Wedderburn perused it. She started when he flung it from him to his desk.

"My dear lady," he said, and his voice had never been gentler than in its utterance of these three words, "this is the letter of a scoundrel, a heartless, selfish scoundrel, who wishes to abandon his sacred responsibilities. He says there was no marriage, that the person who performed the ceremony was not a priest in orders, and that you have no claim upon him. Well, we shall see, we shall see. Now I have a great many questions to ask you, and I will not hurry you with your replies. Everything depends on their exact truthfulness. When and where did this marriage take place?"

"In the house of a friend of Mr. Warre's—Mrs. Fairley, 42, Winslow Terrace," she answered at once, and was enabled to answer in the same clear, concise way every question put to her.

"My dear Mrs. Warre," he said, with significant emphasis, "I think I may say without hesitation that you have as much right to the name as you thought you had. Your unworthy husband ought

to have made some study of Scots law before he went through this ceremony. He seems not to know, what is familiar to the veriest novice, that to publicly accept each other as man and wife before two witnesses constitutes a legal marriage in Scotland."

She sat still a moment, and her face had lost its excited flush and become as pale as death. Mr. Wedderburn started up, afraid lest she was about to faint.

"Do not be afraid. I shall not give way; but the shock of relief is very great." She sat still a moment, while Mr. Wedderburn secretly marvelled at her self-control. "I did very wrong, but I had no one to warn me, and I loved him," she said simply. "I am glad that God will not punish me so bitterly. It has been enough that he could treat me so; I need no other punishment."

Mr. Wedderburn did not know what to say in reply. He was inexpressibly touched, but it was against all precedent to mix up sentiment in the conduct of his business.

"Then what will you do, madam? Will you

place this matter in my hands, and be guided by me?"

"Oh, very gladly. Whatever you advise I am willing to do. Two points only I am decided. I will not force myself upon him, I mean that I will not go back to him, but I must have my name and position acknowledged to the world."

"It shall be done, Mrs. Warre. His family must recognise and provide for you. I will make it my business to carry it through."

I saw Mrs. Warre as she went out, and the distraught look had left her face. No sooner had she gone than Mr. Wedderburn called me to his room, and related to me what passed, precisely as I have here set it down. It was several days before his plans were matured, and at length he told me he had to take a journey south, into Hampshire, with Mrs. Hamilton Warre. There was a curious dryness in his smile as he told me of his intention. I have never seen him throw himself more thoroughly into anything than he did into that case. He was absent about a week, taking the opportunity to look up some legal friends in London. On the day of his return I

received his instructions to wait on him at his house in Heriot Row after dinner to report on all that had passed in his absence. I found him in the best of humours. Fortunately, I had nothing disturbing to tell him, and after we had gone over the few important items, he leaned back in his big library chair, and, taking out his cigar-case, offered me one.

"Sit down now, Lyall, and I'll tell you what happened. It is one of the most curious stories I have ever encountered, and reads more like a chapter from a novel than anything else. I suppose you have guessed what my object was in going into Hampshire with my interesting young client?"

"I supposed that you wished her husband's people to acknowledge her."

"Exactly; and there was no time to be lost, as the precious scamp had just been ordered to India."

"And thought he would get free of all ties and begin life anew," I suggested.

Mr. Wedderburn nodded.

"There was something in the girl that inter-

ested me from the first. Most women placed in such a situation would have been completely overwhelmed. She rose to the occasion from the first, and at Warre Court she behaved splendidly, positively splendidly."

I was amazed. I had never heard him speak in terms of such unmeasured praise of anybody or anything.

"She understood, of course, what you intended to do?"

"Why, of course—she is the sort of woman you can tell anything to. She always understands, and there is no fuss or nonsense about it. I tell you I have no words wherein to express my admiration for her; and unless I am much mistaken, she'll hold her own among them, and that's saying a good deal."

My curiosity was now thoroughly aroused, but there was no manner of use trying to hurry Mr. James Wedderburn. He would only tell his tale in his own time and way.

"We went to London together, let me see, last Thursday. She stayed the night at St. Pancras Hotel, while I went out to see an old friend of

mine at Queen's Gate. Next forenoon we met by appointment at Waterloo, and went down to Poole, which is the nearest town to Warre Court."

"Was she not very nervous at the prospect?"

"Very, but she kept herself under; never said a word, poor thing. She said everything depended on me. I knew, though I did not say so, that everything depended on her.

"When we got to Poole we found that it was a six miles' drive to Warre Court. As we made that part of the journey, I carefully explained to her what I wished her to do."

"What?" I asked, impatient of the silence my curiosity could ill brook.

"Just to remain out of sight in some room of the house until I had had an interview with Colonel Warre or his wife, or both, if they happened to be in the house. We arrived opportunely. They were at lunch, and we had to wait a few minutes until the Colonel was disengaged. We were waiting in a small morning-room; when I explained to the butler that I desired to speak privately to Colonel Warre, he took me to the

library, and I left my client in the room where we had been first ushered.

"'Courage!' I whispered as I left her; but though her smile was rather wintry, I saw that she would bear herself well to the end. It is a pleasure to help such a woman—it is, indeed.

"I had scarcely seated myself in the library when Colonel Warre entered. He was a fine soldierly man, though a stern one, I could see. In the moment of our greeting my resolve was taken. I would not speak a word of my errand except in the presence of Mrs. Warre. In my long experience of human affairs, Lyall, I have more than once seen the whole machinery of the law circumvented by a woman's smile. In this case I trusted more to the tenderness of a woman's heart than to the legal position I could claim for my client. Yet I had not seen Mrs. Warre.

"'I bid you good-day, sir,' said the Colonel, with all the stiffness of an Englishman when he receives a stranger of whose business with him he has no knowledge. At the same time he regarded the card I had sent in with an air which said distinctly that it did not assist him in the least.

"'My name is not familiar to you, sir,' I said. 'I am a lawyer, and I come from Edinburgh. My business is with your son; yet it is a matter which must first be laid before his father and mother.'

"'*And* mother,' repeated the Colonel, and I saw some slight apprehension gather on his face. 'If it is anything in the nature of a trouble, I would wish to spare Lady Warre.'

"I looked surprised, I confess. My client had not told me of the title in the family. I felt that it did not improve the position.

"'I regret that it is not possible to spare Lady Warre. She must be told,' I replied calmly. 'Let me ask a single question. Has your son left for India?'

"'Not yet. He sails on Monday.'

"'And he is in the house?'

"'He is in the house,' the Colonel repeated, and at the same time rang the bell. 'I have your assurance that what you have to say will not be a great shock to my wife?' he added hurriedly.

"'Sir, I am afraid it must be; it is simply this —your son contracted a secret marriage in Scot-

land, and I am here on behalf of Mrs. Hamilton Warre.'

"The Colonel's face became quite grey, and involuntarily he gave the bell another pull.

"'A marriage,' he repeated. 'We knew there was some entanglement. He told his mother the story, and has been forgiven. I left it with her.'

"'I will wait for Lady Warre, if you please, before we go further in the matter,' I said courteously; and the words had scarcely left my lips when she entered. I looked at her with more than a passing interest. It was upon the women involved in the affair that everything depended. I took heart for my client as I keenly scanned Lady Warre's face. It was the face of a sweet, womanly woman—a mother before anything else. She betrayed a slight apprehension as she greeted me, and her husband, who was without doubt devoted to her, immediately placed her in a chair.

"'It is trouble about the boy, dearest,' I heard him whisper. 'Try and be brave.' Then he turned to me, remaining close to his wife's chair, with his hand on her shoulder.

"'Now, Mr. Wedderburn, we wait to hear what you have to say.'

"I did not linger over my recital. I put the facts of the case before them briefly, but with as much power as I possessed. I might have been pleading at the bar, and I saw that my words went home.

"'Oh, Frank!' Lady Warre moaned once. 'To think a son of ours should have been guilty of such cruelty and dishonour!'

"When I had ceased speaking, she rose to her feet. I saw that she had received a great shock, but that the strong qualities of her nature, the instincts of honour and justice, would prevail.

"'If all you have told us is true, sir,' she said, and her sweet, clear voice scarcely faltered, 'there is only one course open to us—my son's wife must be acknowledged. She must come here, and at once.'

"'Madam,' I cried, almost joyfully, for I had not hoped for such a speedy and favourable issue, 'she *is* here. She is in the next room.'

"She gave me a long look. The next moment

she had glided from the room, and I knew her purpose. After she had gone there was no word spoken for a full minute.

"'Is it not strange,' said the Colonel at length, and his face wore a look of pain,—'Is it not strange how the son of such a woman could act as my son Godfrey has done? It knocks to atoms all one's preconceived ideas on the subject of heredity.'

"We talked somewhat together, but nervousness grew on the Colonel, and at last he begged me hastily to excuse him, and hurried from the room. I was left to imagine what I liked. In ten minutes the butler entered and asked me to go to the morning-room. When I entered there I saw that all was well between these three; justice, right, womanly tenderness had won, and my client's sweet face and winning personality had done the rest. But the tragic touch had yet to be put to this strange story. It came when Godfrey Warre, with a fine unconsciousness, in obedience to the summons sent to him, broke in upon the scene. I shall never forget his face. It grew ghastly, and he looked the coward he was. His young wife, whom he

had repudiated, of whose fair name he had sought to rob her, drew a little aside from the kind touch of the other womanly hand which held her. The Colonel folded his arms and looked steadily at his son. I should not like to have been covered by that withering look.

"'Can you explain to me, sir,' he said, in a very awful voice, 'how it is we came to have such a cur for a son?'

"The word cut like a whip. The hot shame dyed Godfrey Warre's cheek, and he clenched his hand, but he never opened his mouth. What could he say? He knew what he had done; the letter which condemned him, and which had broken a woman's heart, lay upon the table. The words of excuse he would have framed died silently upon his lips. I cannot relate all that passed. When the supreme tension of the moment was relaxed there was talk in plenty, and it came at last to some talk of reconciliation. Then my client spoke, I question if any noticed, for the first time.

"'What I have come for I have obtained,' she said clearly, and she did not remove her eyes from

Lady Warre's face. 'I have proved myself to your satisfaction the lawful wife of your son. Your sweet kindness I shall never forget. As for *him*—I shall never of my own free will look upon his face or open my mouth to him again. Mr. Wedderburn, if you are ready, let us go.'

"I saw that her strength was spent, that in another moment her self-control must leave her. I took her hand in my own, but Lady Warre intervened.

"'But, my dear, you cannot go like that. You are our son's wife. Whatever he may have done, you belong to us. I have no daughter. God has given you to us. Stay with me.'

"My client took Lady Warre's hand and raised it to her lips hurriedly, and I felt her trembling in every limb.

"'I cannot, I cannot. Let me go!' she said; and I motioned to them to let us pass.

"'It will be better in the meantime,' I whispered to Lady Warre. 'I think she is right. Perhaps in time something may be arranged.'

"They were obliged to let us go. I saw that nothing on earth would have kept my client

there. The sight of the man who had betrayed her was more than she could bear."

Here Mr. Wedderburn paused, and I saw that the story had laid an uncommon hold on his heart.

"And did she actually come back to Scotland with you?"

"She did. I took her back to her old quarters in Leven Terrace this evening, and I understand that she will resume her teaching on Monday—the very day, by the bye, that her husband sails for India."

"But will that be the end of it?" I asked, in blunt disappointment.

"No, my boy," replied my chief, as he watched the light smoke of his cigarette curl upward. "You may take my word for it, the sequel is to come."

ADAM SHIELS' FRENCH WIFE

ADAM SHIELS' FRENCH WIFE

I WAS sitting idly at my desk one morning, waiting till Mr. Wedderburn should come in. I had finished a piece of work for him, and could get no further until I had his instructions. We were seldom hard pushed in that leisurely and pleasant office, upon which I find it sweet and soul-satisfying to look back even to this day. It was a summer morning, the sun shining warm and bright after a night of rain which had washed the cobbles white, and made living green the garden ground of Charlotte Square. I was thinking of the green hillsides of the Byres and Westerlaw; I could see the sheen on the heather tops, and hear the brawling of the burn mingling with the lilt of the mavis in the lift. My heart was so fully in Faulds at the moment that it did not surprise me, as it might have done at another

moment, to see a familiar face on the opposite side of the street, and a Faulds figure walking slowly and scanning the numbers anxiously to find the one doubtless written on a slip of paper in his hand. I recognised him easily—for indeed the face and figure of Adam Shiels, once seen, would not be readily forgotten. He stood over six feet in his stockings, and was of proportionate breadth. He had a fine, strong, large-featured face, a pair of keen, steady, grey eyes, and that shiny, ruddy skin peculiar to the man who lives in the open, and allows sun and wind and rain alike to work their will with him. He farmed among the wilds of the Moorfoot hills, and had even the name of being not quite right in his head. He lived a queer, solitary life in his lonely farmhouse—shut in by the hills on which his sheep grazed by the thousand; and all sorts of queer stories abounded about the womanless house of Randerston, whose threshold no neighbour or friend had ever been bidden to cross. I only knew Adam Shiels as a peaceable, inoffensive, and very successful farmer, and I had often heard my grandfather say not a man in

Upkeith market could drive a better bargain than Adam Shiels. I guessed, even before he crossed the road, that he was looking for our office, and probably wished to see me. I got down from my stool when I heard him asking for me by name; and when he saw me he looked immensely relieved.

"Guid-mornin', David Lyall; can I speak to you onywhere by yersel'?"

"Why, yes; come in here," I answered, motioning him to the little room where clients waited; then I closed the door, and paused for him to speak.

"I got your address frae your grandfaither. I want to ken the law on a certain point."

He regarded me attentively as he uttered these words, and there was a furtive anxiety in his deep grey eyes.

"I am afraid I don't know very much law yet, Mr. Shiels," I said apologetically. "Hadn't you better wait till Mr. Wedderburn comes? He will be here within half an hour at least. He is living out at Hawthornden at present, and doesn't hurry in."

"I can speak to you in the meantime, for I ken you, David Lyall, and I do not ken Mr. Wedderburn. It's the marriage law I want to ask aboot."

I stared at him amazed, and I saw that an odd nervousness had his giant frame in thrall, and that his strong hands, that could lift heavy weights and break the wildest piece of horseflesh in the Dale, were distinctly trembling, which was one of the oddest happenings that have ever come within my ken.

"What about it, Mr. Shiels? It is very simple, the Scots law in Scotland; though it has wrought confusion many a time on the other side of the border."

"An' further awa', has it no?" said the farmer significantly. "Maybe as faur awa' as France?"

Now what could the man be driving at? He had never to my knowledge been out of the Dale for longer than a day in his life, and France could be nothing more to him than a name he had learned in his geography at school.

"Supposin' noo that a man wantit to marry a Frenchwoman and a Cathlic," he said—and the

words came forth with a tremendous effort—'what has to be done to make it legal, like other marriages, so that there could never be ony trouble efter?"

"I am not quite sure, Mr. Shiels; but I think there has to be a civil marriage as well as the religious ceremony. But it will be the easiest matter in the world to find out."

"Then ye think there would be nae terrible obstacles. I wadna need to gae to France, would I?"

The use of the personal pronoun innocently revealed the secret he had been clumsily trying to keep. But I did not betray by the smallest hint that I was anything but judicially interested in the news.

"Oh, certainly not; there are mixed marriages being celebrated in Edinburgh every day—a few formalities have to be observed; that is all."

"An' supposin' that there were ony bairns o' the marriage?" he said desperately, and his face became a shade deeper in hue. "The Cathlics couldna come an' tak' them awa' an' shut them up in nunneries or sic like?"

I felt moved to laughter, and yet there was something wholly pathetic in the whole matter.

"Certainly not," I repeated with all the energy I could command; "whoever has suggested such a thing to you has been stuffing your head with a pack of lies."

"I thocht as much; an' I said to mysel', I will hae the law on it. Can ye tell me what to do to get this marriage carried through, David?"

"I can find out all the particulars for you in a few hours," I said. "You are going to be married yourself, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am; as ye are a quiet, civil-spoken lad, and have not made a mock at me, as some would hae dune, I'll tell ye a' aboot it. Ye ken the Desrolles that live in that thack hoose on the Moorfoot Brig just below Randerston?"

I have given the French spelling of the name which Adam Shiels, however, pronounced as Dirrell. I remembered them suddenly, and wondered that they had not occurred to me before. Some years ago a Frenchman, with his wife and daughter, refugees for some reason or another from their own land, dropped down in that lonely

moorland parish as mysteriously as if they had fallen from the sky. It made a great talk at the time, and the country folk fought shy of them, calling them Frenchy and other opprobrious names. The little family appeared to have some very slender means, which the mother and daughter augmented by the making of some extraordinary fine lace, which was much sought after by the great ladies in the Dale, while it was whispered that Desrolles himself earned something by writing to the newspapers. They lived so inoffensively and simply, and were so neighbourly and kind, especially to those in distress, that all suspicion was in course of time disarmed, and no one sought to persecute them or to call them names. But of course nobody was intimate with them, the very name of Catholic being a terror in the Dale; and the cross that the little Gabrielle wore round her neck seemed to them a wicked and heathenish symbol. All this flashed back on my memory in a moment, even as I nodded my head in response to Adam Shiels' query.

"Desrolles himsel' died three year ago, an' a month syne his wife dee'd too. The lassie is left

her lee lane. She hasna a frien' in the world. She canna gang back to her ain country, she says. She is willin' to marry me; there is naethin' else to be done."

The blunt, defiant manner of this speech did not in the least deceive me. It was something more than the last extremity with Adam Shiels: it was the desire of his heart, written on every feature of his changing face, betrayed by every vibration of his voice. But I would not have shown him what I thought for the world. I nodded gravely.

"It is a very kind thought on your part; but she is very young, and French ways are different from ours. Have you thought of everything?"

He did not in the least resent this counsel, though he was nearly twice my age.

"She is four-and-twenty. I'm forty-two at Mairtinmas. She is an eident thrifty lassie, an' she's left her lee lane, I tell ye. It's got to be."

"Very well," I said. "I'll tell you what I'll do. Between this and Saturday I'll find out everything for you, and when I come out to the Byres on Saturday afternoon I'll go on to the

Cleugh Station, and come up to Randerston first."

"Very weel, David; thank you kindly," said Adam Shiels, wiping the moisture from his brow.

"I suppose you told my grandfather of your intentions when you went to him for the address?"

"No, I didna. Your grandfather's a sensible man, David; but I would not lippen to him in this affair, nor would I hae lippend to you if I could hae got oot o' it."

I laughed. It was Adam Shiels all over. Reserved, self-contained, secretive to the last degree, he had suffered no man or woman to come into intimate relations with him during all the forty years of his life. I will confess that perhaps I should not have been so urgent and ready to convey to him personally the information he desired had I not felt a strong curiosity to behold Gabrielle Desrolles with my own eyes. I had seen her once when she might be a girl of fifteen, and my recollection was of a tall, pale girl, with black hair and very red lips, which she pursed into

a very proud, supercilious curve in rebuke of my schoolboy stare.

"I dinna like her name. It's michty like the angel Gabriel," said Adam Shiels as he prepared to depart. "I have telt her I shall ca' her Eilen."

"It is more Scotch, but not half so pretty, Mr. Shiels," I replied laughingly. "Then you won't wait to see Mr. Wedderburn? He will certainly be here in a few minutes now."

"No, no; there's nae need," he said, getting with haste to the door. "An' you keep your tongue in your cheek, David. I dinna want the hale country-side clashin' aboot me."

"I won't mention it to a soul, Mr. Shiels, unless I have to take Mr. Wedderburn into our confidence for the sake of getting the information you want. Of course you want to make sure."

So he took his departure, mightily relieved. After all, there are some things that are better shared, even by those whose habit of life is to do and to bear alone. I confided the story to Mr. Wedderburn, and it interested him greatly. He put all the information within my reach at once,

and when I left town I carried the assurance to Adam Shiels that there was absolutely no obstacle in the way of his marriage, after he and his betrothed had observed the formalities necessary in the case of mixed marriage. It was a lovely summer day when I alighted at the little station right in the heart of the cool, green hills. To my no small amazement, Adam Shiels was awaiting me, driving a gig as smart and well appointed as my grandfather's, which was saying a good deal. He looked a finer and a handsomer man among his own hills, where he had lived all his days. His homespun suit, conspicuous in the streets of a city, was here his fitting garb, and I wondered as I took the seat beside him that I had even for a moment thought him rough or plain. I saw that he was anxious, and I set his mind at rest at once.

"That's a' richt," he said, with a quiet satisfaction in his voice. "Ye'll come up to Randerston to your tea, an' when ye gang doon we'll ca' at the cottage."

This was exactly what I desired; and knowing we did not pass the Moorfoot Brig on our way

to the farm, I had already been planning how I was to escape from Adam Shiels, and pay a surreptitious visit on some pretext to Gabrielle. To go with him, however, was the very arrangement I most desired, though I should not have dared to suggest it. I was surprised to find a good deal of comfort at Randerston. It was a very large house, one of those square, solid masses of masonry you find on most of the big hill farms. It was well furnished, too, in that solid, substantial, if somewhat dull manner beloved of the older generation. What surprised me more than all was its cleanliness. Accustomed as I was to the immaculate housekeeping of my Aunt Robina, I could not find a single flaw. The table was neatly set for tea; and when Adam Shiels rang the bell, the teapot was brought in by an elderly man, who, I afterwards learned, did the most of the housework and all the cooking.

"He's an auld sailor, David," said my host to me, when we were left together. "He's worth ony twa women I hae ever seen. In the services they are learned to work with method, and they are disciplined, which no woman has ever been,"

he added, with a dry, indescribable smile, "sin, the days o' Adam an' Eve."

I had seldom been more interested than I was in that strange marriage, and as I talked to Adam Shiels and he talked to me, I found him to be an interesting companion and a most likable man. He took me all through the house and over the steading, and when I said I must be going, got the gig out to drive me to the Byres. After we actually set out, however, he became less talkative, and as we neared Moorfoot Brig relapsed into silence altogether. Some one was watching for our coming, for the moment we drew rein at the gate the cottage door was opened from within, and Gabrielle herself appeared. When I saw her and looked at Adam Shiels, I was more and more amazed. She had grown from lank girlhood into a womanhood most graceful and gracious. She had the incomparable daintiness and distinction of the French woman of the upper class, and her serious face was striking as well as winning, the soft velvet dark eyes capable of deep feeling as well as the glance of bewitching coquetry. She wore a

black dress made high, and unrelieved even by a touch of white. It accentuated the clear paleness of her delicate skin, and made her altogether a personality most striking.

"We canna come in," Adam Shiels called out, as he raised his hat, "because the mare winna stand. Maybe ye can speak to us here. There are nane to see or hear."

"For certain," she answered, and her voice had the prettiest ring. I was very young, and I wished, as she came tripping down the garden path between the high box hedges, that I could have wooed and married her myself. But she had no eyes for me, that I could see, except to ask for the news I might bring. She leaned soberly over the low gateway, and laid her white, slender hand on the strong brown hand of Adam Shiels where it grasped the reins. And I saw him tremble at her touch, and with a faintly bashful look seek to withdraw it. But she held it fast.

"And what does Meester Lyall say to us, Adam?" she asked; and I say again I have never heard anything more adorable than that sweet and broken accent. "Are your Scotch laws then

so vary terrible that they stand in the way of hearts that lofe?"

Anything more incongruous than these words, uttered in Adam Shiels' hearing and with direct reference to him, I have never seen. Again I could have laughed, but again the indescribable touch of pathos restrained me; and I looked only respectfully sympathetic as I replied, "There is nothing terrible about them, Miss Desrolles, except for the evil-doer, nor is there anything to prevent your marriage taking place as soon as it can be conveniently arranged."

She smiled, stealing a glance at her lover, but almost immediately a strange wistfulness came upon her face.

"Tell him, Meester Lyall, since he will not listen to me, that I will make him so poor a vife. And he is so good, oh, so vary, vary good. What he did for my dear mother all the years we haf been here no one knows, save me, an' ze good God."

"Be quiet, lassie; will ye be quiet?" said Adam, with a sternness which sat ill upon him at the moment.

"I vill not be quiet. I must speak now to some one who vill understand and listen. I am vary poor. I haf nothink, only this poor leetle heart, vith its best lofe. He is so reech and so good; tell him, Meester Lyall, he could marry any great lady in the land."

"David Lyall is not a fule, lassie; will ye be quiet, as I bid ye?"

"I think he is marrying a great lady, Miss Desrolles; at least, you look like one," I made answer bluntly. "And all I know about it is, I envy him very much."

Somehow this speech, awkward as it was, seemed to set us at our ease. Gabrielle took the reins from her lover's hand, and with one arm round the glossy neck of the mare, fed her with sweet bon-bons from her pocket, and with sweeter words from her lips. I have never seen a prettier picture, and I must add that Adam Shiels did not then seem out of touch with it. I saw that by some strange means these two lonely hearts had arrived at a complete understanding, and that they were sufficient, one to the other. A great tenderness such as I cannot

describe lay like a flood over the rugged features of the hill farmer, whom none loved and so few understood, and for the first time I saw his real manhood, and knew it to be a noble and a goodly thing. And the mystery of the things that happen day by day lay upon my soul, so that I had little desire for speech. Above all was I filled with wonder over the great things love can do for a man, being then but young and not come to the love of my own life, which was my making. We stayed some little time talking together, and feeling like old friends, and when Gabrielle bade me good-bye her eye was very bright, and the word of thanks she spoke for a service too small to require acknowledgment made my heart beat fast.

"What do ye think o' her, David?" Adam Shiels asked me, as the gig rolled quickly along the smooth, dusty mountain road.

"Think! I think she is a glorious creature, and you ought to consider yourself a lucky man," I cried; and even as I spoke I saw his brow become faintly troubled.

"I'm ower auld, I'm feared I'm ower auld."

"No, no, you're not, Mr. Shiels, and she adores you—yes, adores is the word. I saw it in her face. You'll be happier than anybody in the Dale, and the envy of every man in the country-side."

And he was. Within a month the wedding took place, and so well had the secret been kept that half the parish knew nothing of it till it was over. My grandfather gave away the bride, and from that happy day the bonds of love and friendship never faltered between us and them. The marriage turned out well, and in the Dale to this day there are not more noble, useful, respected young men and maidens than the comely sons and daughters of Adam Shiels and his French wife.

A BIT OF ARCADY

A BIT OF ARCADY

I WAS familiar with his figure in the streets long before I ever had speech with him; and though he wore the dress of a civilian, it was easy to see that he had had a martial training. He carried his tall, spare figure so squarely erect, and held his head so high, that he might have been the proudest man in all Scotland. Yet pride he had none, save that natural and noble pride in honour and integrity which is the backbone of all nations. And he had the gentlest, most generous heart—but I must not anticipate facts which this brief sketch will set forth more clearly than any words of mine.

I was all alone in the office one day except for two of my juniors. It was the lunch hour, and, moreover, Mr. Wedderburn was out of town. When Captain Buchanan came up the steps of

the office that bright August day, there was no one to receive him except me. He had usually a very ruddy face, the face of a man who loved to brave the elements in every mood, but that day he was very pale; his eyes had a drawn, haggard look, as if he were in deep trouble.

"I want to see Mr. Wedderburn," he said brusquely. "Isn't he in?"

"No, sir," I answered. "He is out of town at present; but his nephew will be in at two o'clock."

"Oh, I don't want to see his nephew, I want to see him. When will he be back?"

"Not until next Monday, I am afraid," I answered. "Is there anything I could do for you? I am Mr. Wedderburn's confidential clerk."

"Oh, his confidential clerk, are you?" said the Captain, eyeing me keenly; at the same time he looked down somewhat doubtfully at the little brief-bag he carried in his hand. "Then I suppose that anything I might tell Mr. Wedderburn would come in course to you?"

"It might, and it might not," I answered; "but

I am empowered to go up to Forfarshire and tell him about anything very important. The doctor has forbidden him to come to town on any pretext whatever. If you could give me a message, I would take it up to him, for, as it happens, I am going this very evening."

"I can't give you a message," he said gruffly. "I must either tell you the whole story or hold my tongue. The fact is, young man, I have made a fool of myself, and I have come to see if Mr. Wedderburn can get me out of the desperate hole I have got myself into. He doesn't know me, though I know him very well by reputation. My name is Buchanan—Captain Buchanan, of the Outlook, West Trinity Road."

"I know you very well by sight, sir," I said respectfully. "I have often seen you go through Charlotte Square."

"Looking out of the window when you should have been attending to your business, eh?" said the old man, with a sudden gleam of brightness. "But there, don't let's waste time. I have come to show somebody the papers I have got in this bag, and if it's true that you are Mr. Wedderburn's

confidential clerk, I might as well show them to you as to any one else."

"I will do my best for you, sir," I said; and with that the Captain placed his bag on the table, and, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, proceeded to fit one in the lock; at least, he made an attempt at it, but his poor hands trembled so pitifully that I made bold to offer my assistance.

"Before you look at these papers, I'd better tell you something about myself," he said. "I retired on half-pay just seven years ago, and since then I have been living in the house at Trinity, left me by a cousin whom I never saw. I never was much of a hand at business, and my man, Justin, who was on active service with me for ten years and more, is not much better in that respect than I am. It is a good while now since I found myself in difficulties. I seem to be always giving away so much money to people requiring it—understand, I don't want to publish my good deeds," said the old man, with a deprecating wave of the hand, "but I must give you some explanation of my position, and that's the explanation. You

have no idea, unless you had really been a witness to it, how many people I have had to help in this way, people from all quarters of the globe, some whom I never saw or heard tell of; how they found me out God only knows, but I was always handing out money for something. I have said to Justin sometimes that every needy beggar in the service seemed to have got hold of my name and address. I am not grumbling, mind you; it was my own fault that I gave away the money, but I was always soft-hearted, and never had a penny to bless myself with all my life, so very soon I found myself in hot water. I got the little place at Trinity freehold and free of any burden, but somehow, before I knew where I was, I had a mortgage on it; and the thing I have come about to-day is because the money-lenders have threatened to foreclose the mortgage and turn me out. I don't understand these matters, and, after consulting with Justin, we came to the conclusion that though we have fought shy of lawyers all our lives, we'd be forced to consult one at last. So now, will you look at these papers? I don't understand them myself; perhaps you will be able to

throw some light upon them. The only thing Justin and I between us have been able to grasp is that if we don't pay a certain sum of money in a given time, we've got to leave the Outlook, which, I assure you, would break his heart no less than mine. Yes, indeed, it would break his heart no less than mine," he repeated, and drew his hand swiftly across his eyes, half ashamed of the moisture which rushed to them.

I groaned in spirit as I took out the papers one by one from the worn brief-bag. It was a common story of a simple-minded, unsuspecting nature taken advantage of on every hand. I feared the worst as I proceeded to examine them slowly, and was not surprised to discover that the poor old Captain was hopelessly insolvent, and that nothing except a miracle could save him from immediate bankruptcy. I shall never forget the wistfulness of his look as he watched me making the slight and cursory examination of the documents he had brought. It was the look of one waiting sentence.

"I should not like to say anything about these papers, Captain Buchanan," I said presently,

"until I have shown them to Mr. Wedderburn. If you will kindly leave them, I can take them with me when I go to-night. I have several other important matters to lay before him."

"Very well," said the Captain, with the childlike air of one who has rolled his responsibilities on to the shoulders of another, and bidding me good-day he took himself off. I watched him until he was out of sight, struck anew by the nobleness of his bearing and the sweet and gentle dignity of his mien. I had no doubt in my own mind that he was ruined, his very pension mortgaged, perhaps, for several years to come. I felt that the sooner the whole matter was laid before my chief the better for all concerned, since he had a marvellous power of causing the light to shine in dark places.

He was then enjoying a well-earned holiday with his friends and clients, the Miss Jeffreys, at Pittendrie, and to Pittendrie accordingly I betook myself with my well-filled brief-bag that very evening. I arrived at the picturesque little village station about half-past eight, and was met by a smart dog-cart, which quickly conveyed me

over the three miles of level country road to Pittendrie. It was a most beautiful place, standing in a well-wooded, well-watered park; the hills, rising suddenly from the level plain, towered majestically behind the solid block of masonry which age had mellowed into a tender beauty, and protected it from every wind that blew.

Dinner was over when I arrived, but I found a substantial meal awaiting me, and was immediately bidden thereafter go to the drawing-room, where I found my chief enjoying a quiet game of whist with his kind hostesses and the minister of the parish. They bade me welcome right cordially. I might have been a most honoured guest, so fine was the courtesy they bestowed upon me. I do not think I have ever experienced a more lively feeling of satisfaction than was mine that night when I saw those two sweet and lovable gentlewomen in their own house of Pittendrie. The dream of Miss Anne's life had come true, and she wore her rich silk gown with a modest grace, and both were so unaffectedly happy, so brimming over with loving-kindness to everything that lived,

that even to be in their presence for an hour was to taste of a purer atmosphere, most uplifting to the soul.

It was not until ten o'clock in the evening that Mr. Wedderburn took me to the library to hear what news I had brought. I saw that he was in fine spirits, and, moreover, that he looked rested and refreshed, both in body and in mind.

"This week has done me more good, Lyall, than a month anywhere else," he said heartily. "I'll tell you what it is—it is such women as these that make even an old fellow like me think he has made a mistake in not marrying in his youth."

I smiled, and the natural response was on my lips, but I kept it back, not knowing how he might take a matrimonial suggestion from his subordinate. The more pressing business being disposed of, I laid before him the case of Captain Buchanan. He listened with great attention, his fine face touched with a kindly concern.

"I think I know the old fellow. Certainly I have heard of him from some friends at Trinity.

He has helped hundreds of needy and many undeserving folk. Mark my words, he will not find one to help him now. But I'll look into the thing and see what I can do. The pity is that they don't come to us until the case becomes desperate."

We sat up late examining closely into the Captain's affairs, but we did not find much heartening therein. I saw that the thing lay heavy on my chief's soul. Such cases, involving the welfare of the old, or the helpless, or the weak, always appealed to him, and I have known him find ways and means to help them, often out of his own pocket, without their being any the wiser. For always with such people there is their honourable pride to be considered. He knew, and I knew, that money could not be offered to the Captain, even if it could be obtained from any charitable source, any more than it could have been offered to the Miss Jeffreys in the old India Street days, now happily gone for ever. Next morning at breakfast, I know not by what inspiration, since it was his habit to be reticent to excess over the affairs of his clients,

he began to tell the story of the Captain's reverses to the ladies. I need not say with what tender sympathy they listened. Their past experiences had been such as to make them enter with almost painful interest into such a recital. When Mr. Wedderburn ceased speaking they were quite silent a moment, and then Miss Jeffreys gave a little sharp tap on the table with the sugar-tongs, which she had been balancing a trifle unsteadily in her hand.

"Something must be done," she said emphatically, "and done at once. I have it, Anne: when Mr. Lyall goes back to Edinburgh to-day, he will call upon the Captain with a message from us. We will ask him up to Pittendrie, so that he may talk over the whole matter with our dear Mr. Wedderburn. It will do him good in his harassed and anxious state. Do you not think that is an excellent thought, Mr. Wedderburn?"

She looked round triumphantly, but at the same time there was an eager softness in her eyes which betrayed how her tender heart was troubled.

"It is certainly a kindly one," replied my

chief, "and if I must stay till Monday, it would get the Captain's affairs discussed earlier than would otherwise be possible. You may be quite sure that he is a gentleman whom you may receive with all confidence into your house, Miss Jeffreys. He is of good family, and is universally beloved for his good deeds, which have brought him to this pass."

"He is in trouble, Mr. Wedderburn, and that is sufficient," said Miss Anne, very softly. "And having been in sore trouble ourselves, my sister and I feel for him."

So it came to pass that I bore back to Edinburgh Miss Jeffreys' written invitation to the Captain, and was further charged with many verbal messages, which I delivered faithfully. I confess I was surprised that the Captain accepted the unusual invitation without the least hesitation. It was just the sort of thing he would have done himself, and besides, he was so very anxious to discuss his unfortunate position with Mr. Wedderburn that he could not brook delay. So he departed that very night to Pittendrie. I heard no more of him until Mr. Wedderburn returned to

business five days later. He looked uncommonly bright and well; and after he had seen some who were waiting for him, he called me to his room. Then, for the first time in my life, I saw a twinkle in his eye.

"The Captain is still at Pittendrie, Lyall," said he, "and likely to remain."

"Oh!" I said. "On what terms?"

"One of the things which happen only once or twice in a decade has happened in this case—one of the things we read about in books, but do not believe. Captain Buchanan is an old sweetheart of Miss Anne's, and they are likely to make it up again."

"Oh," I said again. "That is very strange. I do not remember that she betrayed any special interest at the mention of his name."

"That's where the explanation comes in. His real name is Balfour; but the condition of his inheriting his present home was that he took his cousin's name. When he writes his name in full it is Walter Balfour Buchanan. I assure you it was the prettiest scene. I shall never forget it. Of course he does not forget that he is a poor

man, and I left him making desperate resolves to run honourably away. But it won't come off, and 'twould be a pity if it did. The Captain's the very man for Pittendrie. There is no doubt it'll end in a wedding, and they'll all live together as happily as is possible to such guileless beings. Upon my word, I left them with a feeling of envy. Yon is a glimpse of Arcady, Lyall; this is the ordinary work-a-day world."

ON THE VERGE

ON THE VERGE

MR. JAMES WEDDERBURN came out from his room with a queer, dry smile on his face. He held an open letter in his hand, with which he beckoned me from my desk. When I followed him into his room he passed it to me, and bade me read it.

"We seem to have a good deal to do just now with affairs matrimonial," he observed. "What do you think of that?"

He had but newly returned from Pittendrie, where he had been attending the marriage of Miss Anne Jeffreys with Captain Balfour Buchanan. He had come back in a very genial mood, though I fancied it at times not untouched by sadness. Perhaps a pensive regret were the better term, and I wondered whether he was thinking with tenderness of his lost

youth with its many "might have beens." I did not hear the story of that youth, with its crown of self-sacrifice, until years after it was my privilege to know him. It made me love and honour him the more, if that were possible; but of that old story another day.

"It is the letter of a miserable, almost a desperate woman," I answered. "What are you going to do?"

"She must not be allowed to leave him yet, at any rate," he said decisively. "Besides, she will be more miserable away from him. I have seen it again and again."

"But she is very determined. She says nothing will induce her to live with him again; these are her very words."

"Oh yes, and I've heard them often before. She was desperate and determined, I grant you, when she wrote it, but it won't last. I want you to go out now and explain to her the legal position."

"Which is?"

"That she cannot get a separation on the grounds mentioned in this letter, and that if she

persists in leaving her husband's house, he is not bound to support her, and, moreover, he can take the child."

I turned to the letter again and read it through.

"They have had a bitter quarrel evidently," I said. "Do you know anything about them?"

"I know him pretty well. I don't think the fault is his. Certainly he is incapable of such conduct as she attributes to him. He is a fine fellow, but he has the national characteristics very strongly marked in his character and disposition. He is reserved to a degree, and couldn't make a fuss to save his life. She is English."

Mr. Wedderburn's utterance of the last sentence seemed to me to explain everything, but it made me curious to hear something more.

"You think it is a risk, then, for a Scotchman to marry an English woman?"

"Oh, well, perhaps risk is too strong a word; but there can be no doubt the national characteristics are directly opposed. Now this wife of James Abercrombie is a highly-strung, sensitive creature, who lives on words and signs. Realities

mean nothing to her. Everything must be embroidered. Abercrombie can't do it—there it is. Then his relations have made it rather hot for her. I'm sorry for her too; but she wants a good sharp lesson."

"Is she young?"

"Yes, not yet thirty, and handsome. The fact is she came from a big family, where she was idolised. She lived in a garrison town too, where admiration never lacked. It was an awful change for her to come to Edinburgh, with its stiff west-endy ways. She has mortally hated it since ever she came, and has made no secret of her discontentment, which has been very galling to the Abercrombies, as they only tolerated the marriage, doing everything they could to prevent it."

"Won't she resent my going down?" I asked bluntly. "She would rather see you, I am sure."

"Not she. That sort of woman will always talk more readily to a young man than an old one. But if there is any feeling about it, tell her to come up and see me to-morrow at ten.

I shall be engaged the whole day on Dalziel's case, and she wants an immediate answer."

Thus fortified, I took my way to the residence of the Abercrombies, which was situated in a handsome terrace on the other side of the Dean Bridge. I had performed many a strange errand for Mr. Wedderburn, and some wherein I had felt awkward and at a loss, but I had seldom felt more uncomfortable than that snell November day when I knocked at James Abercrombie's door. I was shown at once into a great drawing-room which ran the whole breadth of the house. From the windows at the back there was a glorious prospect, which even on that wild November day did not lack in charm. The sea tossed tumultuously under the lash of the "nor'-easter," and the waves all rode on the white horses, beloved and feared of my childhood. The low coast-line of Fife seemed sharply cut into the long yellow rim of a darkly lowering sky. The sea-birds were all on the wing, sometimes circling low upon the angry sea, their white wings sweeping the dark waters with a fearlessly caressing touch. I had not yet taken my fill of

this fine picture when I heard the door opened by no ungentle hand behind me. I turned hastily, and I saw a swift glance of surprise and anger on the handsome face of James Abercrombie's wife.

"I expected Mr. Wedderburn," she said sharply; "why is he not here?"

"He sends his respectful apologies, madam, but being engaged all day at the Parliament House he cannot wait upon you to-day."

"And pray who are you?"

"My name is Lyall, madam, and I have the honour to be Mr. Wedderburn's confidential clerk."

"His confidential clerk!" she repeated, still covering me with her flashing, imperious gaze. I may be forgiven my passing thought, that a household ruled by that gaze would dwell more in fear than in love. "Perhaps, then, you are acquainted with the contents of the letter I wrote to him last night?"

"Yes, madam, I am," I replied, and stopped there, fearing to commit myself further.

"Tell me what he said, then," she said im-

periously. "Did he send you with any further message to me?"

"He said that if you would allow me I was to explain your legal position. If not, that he could see you to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

"What is the legal position, then?" she briefly asked.

I explained it to her as clearly as I could, and the frown deepened on her face as she listened.

"If that is your Scots law," she exclaimed, in high scorn, "it is all of a piece with the rest of you. There is neither justice nor courtesy nor anything worth the having in this country. I would to God I had never seen it."

At that moment I saw a door open at the far end of the long room, and a small figure in white peep in. Then a joyous shout rang through the air, and the child bounded to his mother's side. A strange, tremulous smile curved Mrs. Abercrombie's lips, and she flung her arm round the child and drew him closely to her side. The same thought, I knew, was in both our minds, that here was refutation of her harsh

verdict. I foresaw that here also was the only means of salvation for the unhappy pair.

"The law that would seek to separate a child from his mother is wicked and cruel and unjust; do you not think so?" she asked curtly.

"The same law holds good in England, madam," I said, "and the cruelty and injustice would entirely depend on the circumstances."

"Oh, I know. I might have known it would be impossible for an unprotected woman to obtain consideration here," she said passionately. "But I will not be frightened into servile submission to the Abercrombie clan, neither will I suffer them to rob me of my son. You may tell your master, if you like, that a woman's wit may yet be able to circumvent their laws, even if she be but an Englishwoman."

I did not reply, for my attention was arrested by the movements of the child. He had wandered to a small escritoire in one of the windows, and had taken therefrom a silver photograph frame, at which he was looking with adoration in his eyes.

"My dad," he said proudly, advancing to

show it to me. I saw that his mother was chagrined, but I took the photograph and looked at it with no small interest. It represented a tall, grave, fine-looking man, whose face I recognised at once. I had often seen him in the streets. He did not look like one to be trifled with. It was the old story of one strong will pitted against another, and a total lack of that mutual forbearance which is the only sure rock upon which to rear the matrimonial fabric. When I handed back the photograph to the child he kissed it tenderly, and holding it to his little breast, talked sweet, loving, baby words to it. I marvelled that the sound did not melt the woman's heart to her husband. It is only the good and the truly kind who win such passionate love from a child. In view of his son's attitude towards him, it was my thought that James Abercrombie might have been forgiven much. Yet did I not believe that he was greatly to blame.

"What is your message to Mr. Wedderburn, madam?" I asked, feeling myself dismissed.

"Only this, that I will not accept what he is

pleased to call my legal position. I will make a position for myself. I will show them all that I can protect my own interests, Scotch though they be."

With these unpromising words ringing in my ears, I returned the way I had come; but it was long before the picture of the little Cecil hugging his father's photograph faded from my mind.

Mrs. Abercrombie was as good as her word. Next day a cab drove up hastily to the door of our premises, and a white-faced, haggard man rushed into Mr. Wedderburn's room. I recognised him at once as James Abercrombie, and surmised from his distraught look that some crisis had come. He stayed a long time, and seemed calmer when my chief showed him out.

Another client was waiting to see him, and it was late in the afternoon before I got my satisfaction concerning Mr. Abercrombie's visit.

"She has taken the law into her own hands, Lyall," he observed, after he had dictated his various letters. "Mrs. Abercrombie, I mean. She's off."

"Off! Where?"

"That's what he's got to find out. When he got back from business yesterday evening, it was only to learn that she and the boy had gone off by train early in the day."

"Probably she has gone back to Colchester," I suggested.

"No. He wired there last night, and again this morning, and they have heard nothing of her. It's my belief she has not gone out of Edinburgh."

"But surely that would be absurd."

"Not so very, I think. She would have the satisfaction of watching the course of events," he said, with a dry smile. "I have advised him to leave her severely alone for a few weeks, after he has discovered her whereabouts."

"Is he likely to discover her, do you think?"

"Oh, certain. I have told him to put Patrick Chiene on her track. After the reconciliation, which will of course take place in due course, through the child, I have advised him to take them away for a long voyage. While they are gone I will look out for a country place for them. She must be got away from all his people."

"How can you think it all out so cleverly, sir?"

"Oh, it's my business, and it is easy to arrange matrimonial affairs from the outside. Nobody knows better how to manage a husband or wife than the person who has never had one."

Time proved that Mr. Wedderburn was right. But the denouement occurred in the most unlikely of all places—his own office. One morning, when James Abercrombie was closeted with my chief, a cab rattled noisily up to the door; and I saw Mrs. Abercrombie alight, accompanied by her boy. It was now the month of January, seven weeks since the November day I had seen her in her own house. These weeks had told upon her; I thought her head less haughtily carried, and there was a hungry, wistful look in her eyes which could have but one significance. Absence had done its work, and I had no doubt in my own mind that love had prevailed upon her to seek a second counsel from Mr. Wedderburn. The child looked well, and not unhappy. Perhaps it is too much to say that the young quickly forget, but it is certain that troubles of the heart lie upon them lightly, and we thank God that it is so. I hastened forward to receive her; she recognised me by a slight bow.

"Mr. Wedderburn is engaged, but will be at liberty presently, madam," I said, and showed her into the little waiting-room, where I left her, and knocked at Mr. Wedderburn's door. He looked annoyed, I thought, at being disturbed.

"I beg pardon, sir, but Mrs. Abercrombie is here with her son," I said hurriedly. I saw his face change.

"It is the working of Providence," he said quickly. "Bring her here. Yes, I'll risk it; bring her here."

I went back and brought the unconscious pair to the door of the private room. My own heart beat. It was a critical moment. The child, with all the impetuousness of his age, pushed the door wide, and then a shrill, sweet, wondering cry broke the sedate stillness of our respectable house.

"Dad! oh, my dad!"

I turned away, and there was a lump in my throat. Mr. Wedderburn came out softly and closed the door. Father, mother, and child were left there, for what seemed a long, long time. When they came out I hardly dared glance in their direction; it was not until they got into the

waiting carriage that I stole a look through the window. They sat together on the seat, and the child was on his father's knee. As the horse started forward I saw her hand steal into his ; and in that fashion they drove away, to begin again the life which pride, and prejudice, and misunderstanding had so nearly wrecked for ever.

THE FORBES SUCCESSION

THE FORBES SUCCESSION

ONE morning in the bitter month of January I was summoned for a private word to the room of my chief. He had a great case in hand, one which was costing him much labour and anxious thought. It was a case involving the honour and good name of a family in which he had been interested for years. But it was not of this case he wished to speak.

"Good-morning, Lyall; sit down," he said, glancing up from his desk. "I've got a particular errand for you this morning. You've heard of the Forbeses of Glentracken. I had a telegram from Sir Patrick this morning, bidding me to the Castle of Glentracken without delay. It is to-morrow he wants me to come. Now that is impossible. The Ormiston case will occupy me the whole week. I have telegraphed that I can't come until next Tuesday, and here's his second wire: 'Send a re-

sponsible person without delay.' Now what am I to do, with my nephew laid up, and Scott Muir in Algiers? You'll have to go yourself."

"I am ready, sir; but is Sir Patrick an old man, or ill, that he cannot come here?"

"He is a very old man. He has not been in Edinburgh for six years or more, and is not likely to come again, I fear. But he does not say he is ill. He writes in evident distress, and wants immediate attention. You must leave to-night, and take his instructions pending my arrival the moment I can get away."

I saw that Mr. Wedderburn was much troubled in mind, and that he would fain have gone off to the far north himself in the face of the snell January weather.

"I wish that you could have done my work here, but that is impossible. You must just do the best you can at Glentracken. I can't for the life of me guess what can be up. Things have been unruffled since 'fifty-four, the year known in the Parliament House as the Forbes Succession year. It can't have anything to do with that; it's impossible."

"Was Sir Patrick's succession questioned?"

"It was contested, my dear sir. We fought it out here, and then it went to the Lords—but it's a long story. You can read it in the train to-morrow. It will help you to understand the case, and perhaps guide you when you get to Glentracken. I needn't impress upon you, I know, that all you have got to do is to listen and hold your tongue."

I nodded. I had learned my lesson well.

"Sir Patrick is a bachelor. He has a niece, who lives with him. I have only seen her once. The trouble may have something to do with her, but you'll see."

Next day I started, in the teeth of a blinding snowstorm, for the north. It was quite possible that before I reached my destination the line would be blocked, and I might be delayed for days at some wayside station. I was fortunate, however, to get right through without any undue delay, and was met at the station of Mordhu by a comfortable close carriage, drawn by a pair of powerful horses, which covered the nine miles of moorland road through the snowdrift at a speed which

astonished me. It was about noon when we arrived at the Castle of Glentracken. I think I see it yet, as I saw it that day in all its winter beauty, one of the fairest pictures my eyes have ever rested on. Clothed in white, its great battlements seemed to be suggestive of a grim and silent strength. It stood on an open plateau, which had been cleared from the dense deer forest of Glentracken; the trees, mostly spruce and larch and fir, were heavily laden with snow, and added to the weird and spotless beauty of the scene. The hall into which I stepped was what one might expect to see in an old feudal house. It was large and bare, so far as decoration or luxury was concerned, panelled in black oak from ceiling to floor, adorned by arms and trophies of the chase, and made comfortable by an immense fire of logs in the open fireplace. The warmth of the sweet pine-scented air met me as I stepped across the threshold, and seemed an earnest of a kindly human welcome. I was taken in charge by a man-servant in a kilt of the Forbes tartan. He took me to a substantial luncheon in a small dining-room, which I learned afterwards was used exclusively by the chief and

his niece when alone, the state banqueting hall being only suitable for entertaining company. I was very assiduously attended by Malcolm Duart, but his manner, with its odd mixture of familiarity and deference, much amused me. He had his suspicions that I was but a lawyer's clerk, and yet I suppose I kept him in some awe, since he did not descend to the smallest gossip in my presence. When I had eaten and refreshed myself, I was bidden come up to Sir Patrick's room. It was a large, wide, pleasant room, hung with tapestry and furnished in black oak, which for a bedroom had a somewhat funereal aspect. I shall never forget the great bed with its four carved pillars and canopy; it reminded me of nothing so much as a funeral car. Sir Patrick was sitting in his wheeling invalid chair at a convenient distance from the fire and pleasantly near the windows, which had a southern aspect. He seemed a man of immense figure, and his extreme thinness made his features seem unnaturally large and prominent. Although he was very old, nearly eighty, his hair was as black as coal, and hung out in a straight fringe below his black velvet skull-cap. He turned on

me a glance of extraordinary keenness, and at the same time motioned me, with the air of one born to command, to be seated. He then turned to his body-servant, who stood behind his chair, and told him to withdraw to the inner room. "You look but young, sir," he said, as the door closed upon us; "but since ye have been sent by my friend and counsellor, James Wedderburn' there is nothing I can do but trust ye. I hope they have seen to your comfort downstairs?"

I assured him they had, and my interest deepened. It was to be still further awakened by that which I was to hear.

"I know that Mr. Wedderburn would not have sent ye could he have come himself. He knows, too, that I am in a sore strait, or I should not have bidden him to Ross in a midwinter storm. Have ye paper, pens, and ink to write down what I shall tell ye?"

I seated myself at the table and prepared my scroll. I had no manner of doubt but that it was a will or some amendment of a will I was to transcribe.

"Write that on the nineteenth of December last

there turned up at Mordhu a young man from God knows where, but we'll say New South Wales, a young man calling himself Patrick Heron Forbes, a claimant to the Glentracken estates. Have ye written that down?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick."

"He stays at Mordhu for ten days, finding out everything and making free with my folk—all this before he dares present himself to me. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick, I do."

"At last one day he came here, and I saw him. But before I go further, tell me, did Mr. Wedderburn tell ye aught of my family history?"

"Nothing; but he gave me the Forbes Succession to read on my journey."

"Then you follow me easily," said the old man, nodding his head. Never for a moment did he release me from his hawk-like gaze,—the gaze which compels a man to put his best foot foremost, as we say in the Dale. To have made even a slight slip, to have ventured on an uncalled-for remark, would have been fatal to my

interest and the interests of the firm I represented. But I had no temptation thereto.

"He is not a Forbes. He calls himself son of my cousin Fergus, that forty year syne left his country for his country's good. But he is not a Forbes, I say, and I gave him the lie to his face."

He did not speak these words in heat, but deliberately, and with an emphasis which was terrible.

"He took it ill, but quietly; that's why I say he is not and cannot be the son of Fergus Forbes, that was called Fighting Fergus from one side of Ross to the other. But I hear now he is to take his claim to the law. That is all the word I wish ye to take to Mr. Wedderburn. He will know how to act."

I jotted down all he said, word for word; and when he ceased speaking I sat in silence.

"Well, what do you think of it, young sir?" he asked, when he saw that I did not obtrude my opinion.

"Everything depends on what proofs Mr. Forbes may possess, Sir Patrick," I replied warily.

He grunted and waved his hand in scornful deprecation.

"Proofs! they may make them, but if the law canna break them it is not worth heeding. Ye can see the upstart if ye like. He is to be found at the Glentracken Arms, opposite the railway station at Mordhu. Either they'll drive ye in this afternoon, or ye can see him as ye go back to-morrow."

"I must stay the night, I suppose?" I said inquiringly.

"Yes. Ye have come a long way, and ye must have a night's rest. Ye will see my niece at tea-time. Mr. Wedderburn was here last year when I broke the entail for her. She shall be lady of Glentracken."

A singular tenderness vibrated in his voice, and was even visible on his face as he said these words, which led me to believe that he was deeply attached to the daughter of his only sister. As I talked further with him I discovered him to be a man of strong character and deeply-rooted feelings. His prejudices were equally strong, however, and he was a man with whom it would

be difficult to live at peace, unless his will were observed as law. In Glentracken, and also in Mordhu, he was as a king, and no man said him nay. It had been reserved for his extreme old age, however, to witness the complete overthrow of his fondest hopes. Later in the day, as I was inspecting, under Malcolm Duart's supervision, the ball-room of the Castle, the walls of which were hung with the family portraits, I was surprised there by a young lady, whose beauty and exquisite grace, seen as it was in that solitary place, seemed nothing short of marvellous. It is over forty years since that January day, but I remember Isabel Lundie as if I saw her before me now. She wore a skirt of grey homespun, and a bodice of the Forbes tartan made in velvet, and fitting her slender figure so that all its graceful lines and curves were given full play. A high linen collar, fastened by a quaint silver badge brooch, gave her the appearance of holding her small head haughtily. But her face was the sweetest the eye of man could see.

"Good-afternoon," she said, and her sweet voice seemed to fill the great gallery with music.

"I have come to introduce myself. I am Isabel Lundie. You can leave us, Malcolm. I shall be glad to show Mr. Lyall the portraits, and anything else in the Castle he may wish to see."

Directly the echo of Malcolm Duart's steps had died away, she, looking wistfully into my face, began to speak of something which had but little connection with the family portraits.

"You have come from Edinburgh for Mr. Wedderburn. Tell me, is he likely to come soon?"

"He cannot be here before eight days, Miss Lundie, because of an important case now before the Court of Session," I answered.

"Oh, I am disappointed!" she cried, clasping her hands together. "He is my friend, and he can make all things smooth. My uncle will do for him what he will for no other. I suppose I dare not, at least I ought not to, ask what has passed between you upstairs. Is it likely that Mr. Wedderburn will come in eight days?"

"It may not be necessary. Sir Patrick has given me all his instructions."

"He will take it to law, then?" she said

desperately, and I saw her proud, sweet mouth tremble. "Oh, Mr. Lyall, it cannot be right. My cousin Fergus—the place ought to be his; it will be his—they may break twenty entails if they like, but I will not take it."

She stamped her small foot almost in a royal disdain. I stared at her stupidly. Her words, and still more convincingly her manner, indicated that so far as the question of succession was concerned she was on the enemy's side. Well, it was a pretty complication. In a moment she put me in possession of some further facts.

"If Uncle Patrick would only see him properly, give him a chance—even look at him with a fair and just eye—everything would be well. He is a noble gentleman; he would make a master such as Glentracken has never seen. He must be master of Glentracken."

"I see you have had opportunities of fully justifying this very favourable opinion, Miss Lundie," I said, looking at her keenly. She blushed divinely.

"Yes, I have—many. I will tell you—yes, I will. I love him; I will be his wife, or I shall

be wife to no man; and if Sir Patrick will not give him his rights I will marry him without a penny, and Glentracken can go begging for an heir."

She possessed her own share of the Forbes' self-will, yet I could not but admire her as she spoke. She looked so winning, so true, so loyal, a woman for whom any man would fight or die.

"Has Sir Patrick any idea of this?" I asked lamely, because often, when we are most deeply moved, our speech is inadequate.

"None, none; I dare not tell him. I believe he would kill me."

"He must be told," I ventured to say. "It might alter the whole aspect of affairs."

She regarded me steadily with a wondering gaze. I saw her breath come quickly, the wavering colour leap in her cheek.

"Who is to tell him? Fergus ought, but my uncle will not receive him. Can I do it—dare I?"

Again she clasped her pretty hands, looking at me with that bewitching, appealing glance. She took no thought of my youth. To her I

merely represented the law — the dread power which could make or mar her happiness. Therefore she spoke out to me the maiden secrets of her soul without reserve.

"You have much at stake. If you will do this within the next two hours, Miss Lundie, I will go to Mordhu and fetch Mr. Fergus Forbes."

I took much upon myself, I knew; but my chief had proved to me again and again the value of the initiative. It was his power of taking the initiative at the right moment which had achieved him some of his most signal successes.

"Will you? that is what I think Mr. Wedderburn would do. But you need not go as far as Mordhu. You will find Mr. Forbes at the Lion Lodge in the forest. Malcolm Duart will show you how to go. I will make my confession now to my uncle. I pray God to help us all."

She was not one to be a laggard. She rang the bell, gave Malcolm Duart his instructions, and I saw her no more.

We had to walk a mile through the snowy woods to the Lion Lodge, a shooting box let to an old Indian friend of Sir Patrick, and there we

found Fergus Forbes being entertained as an honoured guest. Malcolm left me at the door, and when I was ushered in the man I was seeking came to me at once. When I saw him I wondered no more at Isabel Lundie. He was, indeed, as she had said, a noble gentleman. His father had been a reprobate and a ne'er-do-well, but his son carried in his face and bearing all the noblest attributes of the old and honourable name he bore.

I stood before him silently a moment, thinking how strangely events were shaping, and how, not of my own seeking, I was mixed up in the inner and most intimate affairs of a great house, whose name a few hours ago I had scarcely known.

"I am a lawyer from Edinburgh, Mr. Forbes," I said presently. "Will you walk back with me to the Castle? We can talk as we go."

He looked at me with the same lightning glance I had seen in his uncle's eye, and I knew that my youth surprised him.

"I am the representative of Mr. James Wedderburn," I hastened to explain. "But I am here at this particular moment at the bidding of Miss Lundie."

"Ah," he said, drawing a long breath "I can be ready in a moment."

As we walked together through the snowy woods, Fergus Forbes told me the whole story of his life, of his bitter fight against the terrible and adverse surroundings of his youth. It was only on his death-bed that his reprobate father had revealed to him his real name and estate, and had bidden him go home to seek and claim his own. It was a story full of pathos and tragedy; and I saw that the young man by my side felt it all most keenly, most of all the fact that his uncle should have declined to receive or even to recognise him, or to believe for a moment in the truth or justice of his claim.

"But for Miss Lundie," he said, and I saw his full eye brim with a passionate tenderness, "I should go back to the land which has been kinder to me than this cold clime. But now for her sake I will stay, and fight, if need be, to the bitter end."

When we got back to the Castle all was silent. As we stood together by the blazing fire in the hall, a tremendous peal of bells rang through the house, and I saw Malcolm Duart run affrighted up

the stairs. Two minutes later he reappeared, and bade us breathlessly go up to Sir Patrick's room. As we passed by him, he gripped the hand of Fergus Forbes, and pressed it passionately to his lips.

"God go wi' ye, sir," I heard him say, and there was a lump in my throat. I saw that Forbes himself could not speak. When we got within the door of Sir Patrick's room, this was what we saw: Sir Patrick in his chair, turned towards the door, so that he might catch the first glimpse of any who entered. His niece kneeling at his side, with her face hidden on the arm of his chair. His face wore a terrible expression, his eyes seemed to burn into us with their intense and penetrating gaze. But the moment his eyes fell on the figure by my side a strange cry rang through the room.

"It's Fergus himself, as he was when we were lads together in Glentracken." He stretched out his arms, all his pride and his rage melted in the great flood of yearning memory which swept over him. Then I turned away very softly, and closed the door. They had no more need of the law.

The Forbes Succession case was at an end.

THE LITTLE OLD LADY

THE LITTLE OLD LADY

I DO not think there are so many characters in Edinburgh as in the old days. They tell me that the rapid strides of civilisation, which have done so much to cement the bond between Scotland and England, have not been without disadvantage to the Scotch. They are no longer, in the same sense, a nation apart. Types are fewer, and in the cities, at least, the people are very much alike, and the old original, individual touch is seldom found. This must, to the old among us, be a matter of the keenest regret. In my day the streets of Edinburgh were peopled with rare, kindly, wonderful folk, each one set apart by some delicate, indefinable, individual touch. It was my great good fortune, through my association with the old Wedderburn house, to come in personal contact with many of the

old Edinburgh worthies. Among them all I do not suppose there was one more delightful or more thoroughly Scotch than she whom we called the little old lady, but whose name was Miss Campbell Ure of Poltane. Her town house was in Ann Street, one of the quaint, old-fashioned streets of the north side, which still retains something of its old-world flavour. Not so long ago I walked through it, just for auld lang syne, to look at the house of the little old lady, and it warmed my heart to find it so little changed. The little tufts of grass still grow greenly in the causeway of the street; the houses have still the quiet, genteel, undisturbed look; no sound from the busy city penetrated the cool, quiet place as I stole softly up one side and down the other, glad yet marvelling much that forty years should have wrought so little change.

Miss Campbell Ure paid periodical visits to Mr. Wedderburn, and I had known her by sight a long time before I had speech with her. She came one day, however, when there was no one to receive her but me. She drove in an old-fashioned barouche, drawn by a pair of long-

tailed, cream-coloured horses. The coachman was old and fat, but the tiger who sat behind was as smart as the Poltane livery could make him. I think I see the little old lady yet, as she alighted from the carriage, holding her flounced silk skirt high in front and showing her white petticoat; she wore a cottage bonnet filled in with roses, and she had a bright green parasol with a folding stick and long fringes, which waved to and fro in the summer wind. Her dress was twenty years back at least, but it was part of herself, and she looked the perfect gentlewoman she was. She had a small, neatly-featured face, ruddy cheeks, and a pair of black, bead-like eyes, which nothing escaped. I thought her paler than usual, and when I waited upon her in the private room to explain Mr. Wedderburn's absence, I fancied her nervous and ill at ease. Now Miss Campbell Ure spoke the broadest Scotch then, and to the day of her death. She had many words in her vocabulary, indeed, the meaning of which I had to guess at. There are some, I well know, who in these degenerate days call that sweet, old-fashioned tongue vulgar, not knowing

that they themselves are only vulgar in their contempt of what they do not know and cannot understand.

"I want to see Mr. Wedderburn," said Miss Campbell Ure, in her shrill, sweet voice. "Why is he not at hame, as he ought to be in a mornin'?"

I explained that he was at the Parliament House, and could not be seen for four hours at least.

"I ken ye by name an' by repute, young man, being first cousin to Mr. Claude Innes, of Innes-hall, so as ye are no an ootlin I'll tell ye my trouble, because it's a sair trouble, I cannot thole by mysel'."

"Please sit down, Miss Campbell Ure," I said, with all the respect I felt, for there was something at once winning and pathetic in her whole manner and look.

"I thank ye kindly. Will it be possible for me to break the Poltane entail, young Lyall? Do ye ken enough o' the law to tell me that?"

"It is possible in some circumstances to break

any entail, Miss Campbell Ure, but hardly ever advisable, except in the case of some crime or unfitness in the heir."

"Well, it is a crime, naething short o' it. My nephew, Archie Campbell Ure, says he will tak an English wife, an' I say that nae English hizzie shall be mistress at Poltane. Has sic a thing ever been heard o'? An' is there no enough well-faured an' eident gentlewomen in Scotland that Archie Ure should do this thing? An' she's a naebody, the dochtor o' some bit country doctor in the toon where his regiment is quartered. An' he has the impidence to write an' ask me to bid her on a visit to my hoose in Ann Street. Certy, he has a bold face. Never, never while I live will I welcome an English niece; an' I hae written to him to that effect wi' nae uncertain pen."

I stood perplexed, not knowing what to say. The little old lady was so irate, there was no manner of use in reasoning with her. Captain Ure's offence seemed to me but a light one, but I could not presume to say so to his aunt.

"Weel, I need not bide here speaking to you,

lad, for ye are but young, an' only a learner at the law. Make my compliments to Mr. Wedderburn, an' bid him, if he has nothing better to do, to dine with me at Ann Street the night at seven o'clock, so we can talk ower my nephew's folly. Oh, an' ye can tell him if he kens a decent lass who is a gentlewoman born, who would not be above companioning an auld wife like me, he may send her to see me. I'm tired bidin' my lane, an' I will pay her a matter o' twenty or thirty pounds a year."

So the little old lady, shaking her flounces and her green silk fringes in righteous indignation, took herself out to her barouche and rode away. I delivered her message faithfully to Mr. Wedderburn, but he made no comment thereon. He was weary and dispirited, I saw. The case in which he was interested had not gone well that day, and his interest in the affairs of the little old lady was but languid. I never learned whether he dined in Ann Street that evening, and it was some time before I heard any more about the little old lady and her troubles. One day I met the carriage in Princes Street, and observing a

very sweet-looking young lady sitting beside Miss Campbell Ure, I concluded that she had got a companion to her mind. The very next day, in the afternoon, just before Mr. Wedderburn's hour for leaving the office, a gentleman in military dress came hastily up the steps and asked for him. I heard him give the name Captain Campbell Ure, and I looked at him with a good deal of interest, remembering the little old lady's attitude towards him. He was a tall fellow, goodly to look on; just the sort of nephew a maiden aunt would be likely to adore. I wondered very much, as I gathered together the threads of the day's work, what would be the outcome of his desire to marry an English wife. He remained quite an hour with Mr. Wedderburn, and when he came out I thought his face wore a quietly determined look. The moment he had gone Mr. Wedderburn sent for me.

"That was Captain Campbell Ure of Poltane who went out, Lyall."

"Yes, sir. Is the trouble with his aunt settled?"

"No; it has become complicated to a degree

that will take a lot of unravelling. I persuaded Miss Ure to let the matter rest a little, and told her that if she let them alone probably the Captain would change his mind. She's got a companion. Whom do you think?"

"I have no idea," I answered, though I recalled her face perfectly.

"The Captain's own fiancée. She conceived the brilliant idea of coming and storming the fort in person, and she's done it."

"Well, sir, what then?"

"The old lady has to be told. The Captain is ordered to India, and he says he won't go without his wife. He wants me to go down and tell Miss Ure, but the truth is, I'm afraid, because I was in the plot from the beginning," said my chief, and he laughed heartily at the thought of it.

"I don't know that it was quite fair," he said at length, in a more doubtful voice. "But, really, Miss Ure's prejudice against everything English is carried to absurd lengths; but she'll be very angry. Shouldn't wonder if she cut us all over it."

"Has the Captain gone down to Ann Street now?"

"Yes, I advised him to go and act on whatever impulse the moment brought him. I confess I am a bit anxious over the upshot of it. I think I'll go down myself and see if I can smooth over things. I owe it to them, but it's a ticklish business. The little old lady doesn't like to be made a fool of."

He clapped on his hat, and walked away down to Ann Street with a firm tread, which seemed to say he would do his duty whatever it cost him. Next day he told me his experience after he had gone through the morning letters.

"When I got down to the house I was shown into the drawing-room, where I found Captain Ure kicking his heels. He had been waiting more than half an hour, his aunt having declined to see him, and he equally determined not to leave the house until some arrangement was come to. Miss Drummond, his aunt's companion, for whom he asked when his aunt refused to see him, had gone out to tea. When I sent my card to Miss Campbell Ure, I was bidden come

to her in the dining-room. I found her sitting there like a sphinx. I knew that determined-looking mouth of yore, and I feared the chances of reconciliation were but small.

"'If ye have come on behalf o' that ungrateful rascal up the stair, Mr. Wedderburn,' she said snappishly, 'I can only bid ye a good-afternoon. I will not make any speech wi' you concerning him.'

"'But he is ordered to India, Miss Ure, and the chances are, now that this awful mutiny has broken out, that you will never see him again.'

"'He maun take the fortunes o' war,' she said harshly, but I saw her cheek blanch and her mittened hands tremble. 'An' I wish him a less rebellious heart afore his time comes.'

"'You will be sorry that you have not bid him God-speed,' I said. 'Let me tell him to come down.'

"'No, I will not see him. He has disappointed my dearest hopes. If only he had been guided by me, he might have had to wife the sweetest lass that ever stepped—her that's bidin' wi' me now, an' that has been mair than ten bairns to

me. If only I could break the entail, she should be mistress o' Poltane. If he had but taen my advice an' come to mak her acquaintance, but he was undutiful an' unbiddable from first to last.'

"'Perhaps it was superfluous, if he already knew her,' I said desperately.

"'I wonder to hear ye, Mr. Wedderburn,' said Miss Ure in extreme scorn. 'Ye are not the man ye were. Go up an' tell Captain Campbell Ure that he has my best wishes, an' that I hope he may do his duty by his Queen an' country better than he has done it by me.'

"At that moment the door opened, and Miss Drummond entered. The little old lady turned to her joyfully, but with a distinctly appealing glance.

"'Mary, my nephew is here. Help me no to see him. I owe it to mysel'; an' I will *not* see him.'

"She stamped her little foot, and Miss Drummond, confused and distressed, looked at me.

"'He is ordered to India,' I said. 'You had better confess. I'll send him down.'

"With that I left the room. As I did so the young lady threw herself at Miss Ure's feet. I ran up to the drawing-room, and put my head round the door.

"'They want you downstairs, Captain Archie,' I said, and incontinently made good my escape. I have heard nothing since. I pray all may be right. Perhaps we may hear something to-day."

Before I could make any comment on my chief's interesting recital, a sudden tap came to the door, and the boy announced with dignity—

"Miss Campbell Ure; Captain Archibald Campbell Ure."

I rose up and made good my escape, but not before I saw the third person, whose name was not announced, and gathered from her sweet, radiant face that all was well between these three.

They were married before the Captain sailed, and during the long, terrible months of anguish and suspense following upon the black record of the mutiny, the two lonely women abode together in the house in Ann Street, upholding each other

by love and tender ministration and many prayers.

Fifteen months after there were great rejoicings at Poltane to celebrate the triumphant home-coming of Colonel Ure, who returned covered with glory. By that time the heir was five months old. They were a very happy family, but the little old lady was undoubtedly the happiest of them all.

UNCLE JAMES BATHGATE

UNCLE JAMES BATHGATE

HE was a Faulds worthy about whom a whole book might be written, not without entertainment. It seemed to me that I had known him from my infancy, and that he had always been an old, old man. He had a farm about four miles from the Byres—a cold, bare, stony place on the edge of a heathery moor—a place which had well earned its name of Windyghoul. In addition to the farm, he had a slate quarry, where he employed a number of men. He also supplied the slates by contract, delivering them on rail by his own carts, and was altogether in quite a large way of doing. But if he was as rich as they said he was, but little sign of it was observed in the old house of Windyghoul. I remember being taken there once with my mother to make a call, and never forgot the miserable, poorly furnished,

comfortless-looking place. That was when I was a boy in my teens, and the occasion of the call was to pay a friendly visit to the orphan nieces of Uncle James Bathgate, whom circumstances had lately left to his tender mercies. They were the daughters of his only sister, who had married a ne'er-do-weel. The sympathy of the whole Dale went out to these pale, troubled-looking girls the first Sunday they sat in their uncle's pew in Faulds kirk. He was a hard man, one "no just wi' greed," as they put it, and as he had never had any womankind about him in Windyghoul, their lot was not envied. It was a very remote place, the Byres being the nearest habitation; we were in a manner their next-door neighbours. But though my mother, and afterwards my Aunt Robina, tried to show some little kindness to the forlorn girls, nothing came of it.

"Uncle James Bathgate doesn't want us to visit anybody," said Amy, the eldest of the three, to my mother, as we came out of the kirk one day. They invariably gave him his full title, and seemed to regard him with fear and trem-

bling. "He says work is the salvation of men and women, and that everything else is waste of time."

With that, my mother marched boldly up to Uncle James Bathgate as he was exchanging the barest of greetings with Easterlaw and some of the rest, and gave him a little tap on the arm with the stick of her parasol. I remember it was a blazing hot August day, and we had all been very drowsy in the kirk, and the smell of peppermint and southernwood had been stronger than usual.

"What's this? Miss Hedderwick tells me, Mr. Bathgate, that you don't want them to visit anybody in the Dale. Nonsense, nonsense! Don't you think any of us good enough, then, for your nieces, eh?"

I saw the girls exchange glances of wonderment that any should be so brave as to put such a straight question to their uncle. And my mother, at no time an imposing person, was then looking very frail and pale and slight. The old man turned his shaggy brows on her in a frown, which, however, instantly melted before the sweetness of her smile.

"They are best at wark, Mistress Lyall," said he gruffly. "Had their mither no been an idle hizzie afore them, they wadna be in the plight they are the day. It's idle folk the deil catches, an' nae ither."

"'Still, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,'" said my mother stoutly. "And don't forget that the lassies have no mother. Nothing can ever make up to them for that loss. When are you to give a house-warming for them at Windyghoul? I must come over and talk about it."

"Ye needna fash, my woman," said Uncle James Bathgate, still grumpily. "There'll be nae sic ploys at Windyghoul while I'm alive, nor efter it, if I can help it."

Such was his attitude; and but little came of my mother's well-meant effort to brighten existence for the lonely girls. Uncle James Bathgate took care that they should have plenty of occupation. Soon after he took them to Windyghoul, he purchased a large number of cows, and started a dairy business. Being very near Upkeith, he always had a market for the produce, and did well with it. Now, any one who has knowledge

of dairy farming does not need to be told what constant, never-ending toil it is for the women engaged in it; and those who do not understand it would, I fear, not believe it possible that so much active labour could be crowded into the hours of a working day. These poor girls, brought up somewhat gently by their mother, did not take very kindly to the unaccustomed toil. I never saw them without a tired look on their faces, and they always slept the sermon through. But I must hasten to tell what Uncle James Bathgate did for them in the end. One day, from the office window in Castle Street, I saw the old man in his shabby green overcoat coming slowly up the street. I recognised him in a moment, and I realised for the first time that he was an old, old man. His shoulders were very round, and he walked with a feeble and halting gait; he seemed to have crept together since I saw him last. It was a bitter winter day; the stiff nor'-easter blowing up from the Firth was enough to chill even warm young blood. I knew that he must have been up before six o'clock, and must have driven seven

miles across the hills to catch the morning train to bring him to Castle Street at eleven o'clock in the day. I was not aware that he was a client of Mr. Wedderburn's, though I learned afterwards that they had known each other for forty years. He saw me as he walked through the outer office to Mr. Wedderburn's room, and acknowledged me by a slight nod of the head, which had nothing of friendliness in it. His face seemed to have lost its ruddy tint, and he looked as if he were suffering, as I afterwards learned he had been all his life, from a painful and incurable disease. Ah, how we misjudge one another here, and how slow we are to find any charitable reason or excuse for the faults and failings of our neighbours! We thought at the time that the case of Uncle James Bathgate would be a lesson to us all, but I fear the impression soon passed away. He remained quite a long time with my chief that morning, and when he went away he acknowledged me as before.

"Do you know Mr. Bathgate, of Windyghoul, Lyall?" Mr. Wedderburn asked me in the course of the day.

"Yes, as much as I want to know of him," I replied in the unthinking way of youth. At this I thought he seemed surprised.

"I think," he said slowly, "that you know very little about him. I would call him myself the salt of the earth."

Now this speech filled me with such amazement that I could not utter another word. I felt that I was sharply rebuked without a cause. The day after that Mr. Wedderburn came to me when he entered the office.

"I am to be out in your direction to-day, Lyall, and may seek a cup of tea from your aunt in the by-going. I suppose you know the estate of Whinny Hall?"

"Yes, I know it well; it's a lovely spot; but it has never been in the market."

"It is now, then, and I'm going to look at it for a client. They want a stiff figure for it, though, forty thousand. I shouldn't mind having your grandfather's opinion on it, so, perhaps, I shall call in at the Byres first, and ask him to drive over with me."

"He'll be delighted, I'm sure, but I can tell

you he thinks very highly of the place. I have heard him say that if he did not live at the Byres, he would like to live at Whinny Hall."

"You know the man that wants to buy it, too, then—Mr. Bathgate, of Windyghoul. He's a dying man, he says, and his lease is out. He is going to settle Whinny Hall on his nieces. He seems to be much attached to them. I hope they appreciate his goodness."

There was something for me to ponder over all day. It came between me and my desk again and again. It was not so much the fact that Uncle James Bathgate was a far richer man than we had dreamed, but that Mr. Wedderburn should have formed such a high and mistaken opinion of him. I said nothing, of course, about what was in the wind; and on the Saturday of that week, when I went out as usual to the Byres, I found my grandfather and Aunt Robina full of Mr. Wedderburn's visit, and the probable purchase of Whinny Hall. But they, of course, had no idea who the intending purchaser might be, and I had to hold my tongue. But I looked very attentively at Uncle James Bathgate in church that morning,

and I saw that he was indeed "far through," as we say in the Dale. I also observed the kindly solicitude of his nieces for him, and saw that he leaned heavily on Amy Hedderwick's arm as he walked down the path, where the first snow of winter lay soft and fine waiting for its companions. It was the last time he was seen in his accustomed place, which knew him no more for ever. He was ill in the house all the winter through, and his nieces waited on him with exemplary tenderness and care. Amy told my aunt one day that he was so gentle and unselfish, and grateful for the least attention, that they could do nothing but cry because they had misunderstood him so long. In February he died, and when the will was read there never had been such a sensation and stir in the whole Dale. The estate of Whinny Hall was left to the three Miss Hedderwicks, accompanied by a touching message of gratitude and farewell. Also he left a letter to each of them, explaining his reasons for having treated them with such apparent harshness. The fate of their mother, his poor sister, who had been allowed to do exactly as the spirit

moved her, was ever before his eyes, and he sought by filling all their moments with occupation to save them from a fate like hers. My Aunt Robina saw these letters, and could never speak of them without tears. But a greater wonder than Uncle James Bathgate's treatment of his nieces remained. He had apparently, during the last years of his life, made it his business to discover all the needy ones of the Dale, poor widows and fatherless children, and all the useless folk whom people say are nobody's enemy but their own. For all these he provided with a care and foresight and shrewdness which astonished all who heard of it. Then it was found that for many years before his death he had been an anonymous benefactor to many in trouble, that he had literally fulfilled the Scripture injunction regarding the good deeds of life. His left hand did not know what his right hand did.

There never was such a burying in the old churchyard, except when we laid our beloved and revered Adam Fairweather to his rest. The service was of the simplest, and, according to his instructions, a plain headstone was erected on his grave, bearing these words:

Here lies
JAMES BATHGATE,
Farmer in Windyghoul, Faulds,
Who died there in the 79th year of his age.

"Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand."

And again at the foot of the stone:

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

Uncle James Bathgate did more by his death than his life to still the spirit of uncharitableness and evil speech in the Dale. I think we were all more careful, for a time at least, to put a bridle on our tongues and to hesitate before we passed a harsh and faulty judgment on others.

"WHICH PASSETH UNDERSTANDING"

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THE old-fashioned master and mistress commanded old-fashioned service. It amuses me at times to read in sundry printed periodicals that prizes are offered for five or seven or ten years' service, as if such terms were a world's wonder. In my boyhood the servants in all the houses where we were on terms of intimacy were members of the family, and the leaving of one would have been a family calamity. My mother had but two serving-maids in the whole course of her married life; one of them was married from the house, and the other survived the death of her beloved mistress but two days. My Aunt Robina, perhaps, being of a less gentle nature, and more exacting in her demands, instituted shorter terms of service at the Byres. But my grandfather had

but one grieve and one foreman in the place for over forty years, and both died in the little cot-houses to which they had brought their brides, and where all the bairns had been born. It is the pathetic story of David Lumsden and Teenie his wife I would here set down, though I feel I am scarcely worthy the task. It was impossible to imagine the Byres without Dauvit, as he was familiarly and universally called. My grandfather was the nominal farmer, but Dauvit made the laws and carried them out with a dogged faithfulness which never faltered or grew weary. In the busy time of harvest, when so much was at stake, he scarcely closed an eye; it was the same at the lambing time, he would be up night after night with the ewes; nor did he ever make a boast of it; all was done as a matter of course, his simple duty, nothing more. Nor was he accorded any special gratitude or praise for it all; my grandfather accepted it as a matter of course, too, and the relations between them were perfect. Sometimes, however, there would be a little dry friction in busy times. My grandfather was of a fidgety, impulsive temper, and occasion-

ally in harvest some such encounter as this would take place :—

"Ye'll open the roads on the back braes the morn first thing, dy'e hear, Dauvit?"

"I'm hearing, but the back braes maun wait or the Law be shorn," replied Dauvit placidly.

"We canna wait, Dauvit. Ye ken as weel as me that the braes need three days longer to dry than the Law."

"I ken, too, that the Law is ripe and the braes no, maister," Dauvit would reply placidly; then my grandfather would get a little nettled.

"Whether am I the maister or you, eh?" he would ask.

"Whichever ye like," Dauvit would reply without a tremor. "But I've cut the Law afore the braes for thirty year, an' I'm no gaun to try any new-fangled plans this year, whatever ye may say."

"Very weel, ye thrawn deil, hae your ain way," my grandfather would say, shaking his stick at him; and so the breeze blew over.

Dauvit—reserved, taciturn, self-contained far beyond any power of mine to describe, "a very

still man," as I've heard my aunt say—had one of the sweetest of wives. She was a second mother to me, nothing less. How can I describe her small-featured, sweet, kindly face, where the smile waited always, and was not quenched even by the anguish of the physical suffering which darkened the later years of her bright, unselfish life. I wish it were possible for some eloquent pen to describe with a tender faithfulness the life of such women as Teenie Lumsden—women to whom I am proud to think my country can still give birth. She was in herself quiet and unassuming, taking up joyfully and with patience the homely duties of each day, attending to her own household with an exquisite motherliness such as must be seen and felt, since it cannot be described. She bore a large family, of whom many died in infancy; two sons emigrated, and in their old age she and Dauvit were left alone together with their memories. They bore the many sorrows of their family life without a murmur or a sign. If they shed tears, they were not permitted to be seen; everything was hidden deep. But it is the hidden things which set lines upon the face, and make

pathetic curves about mouths which to the unobservant seem only stern. As each fresh blow fell, and the mounds in the kirkyard grew in number, Dauvit became more "still" than ever, his deep-lined brows seemed to frown a little more, and his shoulders took on the stoop of age. As for Teenie, the look on her face was one of wistfulness always, and her eyes, when they were uplifted in the kirk, reminded one of the words :—

> "I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
> From whence doth come mine aid."

They had a look in them of one who is weaned away from earth, and whose treasure is in heaven. We all noticed at length that Teenie was failing, and my aunt often wished to send one of the maids down to the cot-house to give her a hand with her washing, but nothing came of it. One evening about nine o'clock Aunt Robina, after making some strong beef jelly for my grandfather, who now needed such support, and could not take his porridge and milk of an evening, put a shawl about her head and said she would run down with

some to Teenie. I walked with her and waited at the garden gate till she came out. I remember it was an October night, and the little kailyard had an autumnal look with its yellowing cabbage leaves, and the stunted potato shaws ready for lifting. My aunt was not long, and when she came out she walked with a hasty step. I saw her wipe her eyes as she came down the path between the box hedges, which for forty years had been Teenie's pride.

"Eh, Davie, that's a sight to see," she said. "I had no idea that Teenie was so far through, or that Dauvit could do it."

"What was he doing?" I asked, with interest.

"He's washing, Davie, all their bit things, an' Teenie directing him how to do it. It hurt them for me to see it, but it hurt him more when I said I must send Agnes down to help them. He just looked at me in his still, quiet way and said,—

"'I'll do the bit turn as long as I'm able, Miss Robina. Oor hoose is oor ain, an' we're for nane o' the maids here. It wad be the death o' Teenie to hae them strampin' through her hoose.'"

My aunt could not sleep that night, and before breakfast she was at the cot-house again. But on that occasion she found Teenie up and about doing her little morning duties blithely as of yore. Almost she could have fancied what she had seen the previous night nothing but a dream. The next day was Monday, and about two o'clock of the afternoon, after I had returned to the office at Castle Street from my lunch, I was surprised to see Teenie Lumsden enter, and I heard her ask for me. She was quite alone, dressed in her best; but I could see that her face under her veil was very wan and white.

"Could I speak till ye a meenit alane, Davie?" she said. She had called me Davie all my days, and only one voice has spoken that name in my ears with a more comforting tenderness.

I took her by the arm, for my heart was very full, and led her into the little waiting-room, where I sat her down in a comfortable chair, untied her bonnet strings, and gave her a glass of water.

"That's my ain laddie; sic presumption o' me to seek ye here, but I wantit to ken something, an' this was my chance."

"Tell me what you are doing in Edinburgh at all; there was no word of it yesterday," I asked quickly.

A grave, indescribable look came on her face, and she gave a little pathetic laugh.

"Dauvit went to Lauder fair this mornin', as ye ken. It was my only chance. I've been to the doctors at the infirmary, Davie, an' it's daith. I kent it was mysel, but I wantit to mak sure; an' naebody's to ken. Ye winna tell, d'ye hear?"

"Oh, Teenie!" I said, and for the life of me could not utter another word.

"They say I may live till the spring if the winter be na severe," she said quietly. "I only wantit to ask ye aboot my bit o' siller. I hae a maitter o' fifty pound in the Upkeith Savings Bank. It'll be Dauvit's after I'm awa. Is there anything I maun dae to mak sure he will get it, an' that naebody will seek to divide it wi' him?"

"You can make a will, Teenie. I will draw it out, and when I come home on Saturday you can sign it."

"That's a' richt; but fancy me makin' a will,"

she said, with a little humorous twinkle in her eye, "me that has never dune any business a' my days. I'll be upsides wi' Dauvit then."

"He doesn't know you are here to-day, then?"

"No, an' he maunna ken," she said promptly.

"But—but it is hardly fair to him to keep him in ignorance of your serious condition."

"Oh, fair enough. The Lord wull open his een in guid time. When the door is shut on us twa oor lane, the licht will shine in. He's no able for sudden shocks, Davie; an' I will spare him as long as I can. It was only to ease my ain mind that I cam. Promise me ye'll tell naebody, no even Miss Robina."

I looked at her in wonder. To see such brave determination, such unselfish endurance in so frail a frame, was at once amazing and unspeakably touching. The soul seemed to shine out like a heavenly radiance in the face, where already sore pain had set its mark; there was neither repining nor impatience nor fear, only a steadfast peace, the peace which the world can neither give nor take away. What could I do but give the promise she required? I begged an hour's leave from

work, and took her to have a comfortable meal, and finally put her in the home-going train.

"Sic a ploy we have had, my laddie. I'd like to chaw Dauvit when I get hame," she said, with her sunshiny smile. "But mum's the word."

I kissed her through the open carriage window, which scandalised her a little, but I saw that it pleased her too. As for me, there was that in my heart towards that plain country woman which I cannot here set down. She was one of the Lord's elect, chosen for suffering, yet glorifying Him through all.

The story of that winter in the cot-house at the Byres would fill a book. The work of grace continued and perfected in these two souls was the wonder of the whole parish. Never was there a more gentle, devoted nurse than Dauvit, never a more grateful, happy sufferer than Teenie. The Man of Sorrows abode with them, and when the door was shut upon them "their lee lane," as Teenie expressed it, earth was forgotten, and only heaven remained. The ministered unto and the ministering had the way of sorrow illumined for them by love, both human and Divine. She died

in February, just as the first snowdrops nodded in the winter sun. No one was with her at her death but her own man, who had been all things to her through the weary months of her suffering. No woman could have been more tender or thoughtful or considerate. She wanted only him. Yet some will say that marriage is a failure. Ah, they have not probed the deeps of human love and tenderness. They do not know what possibilities lie hid even in the "still" natures that are so often misunderstood. The world, our little world especially, was the poorer when Teenie left it; but even now—over the bridge of forty years—the fragrance of that sweet, hidden, unselfish life may have its message for some human soul.

"FOR HIS OWN SAKE"

"FOR HIS OWN SAKE"

HE was a very proud and pompous-looking old gentleman, who used to come on rare occasions to our office; one of the clients who would see Mr. Wedderburn, and no other. The mere suggestion of a subordinate would have roused his deepest ire. His name was Alexander Brydone, and he was the head of the old family, Brydone of Whitekirk, in Galloway, who had their town house on Randolph Cliff, looking across the Dean Valley to the rolling waters of the Frith of Forth. He had come late to his title and estate, which he did not inherit in direct descent, but from a cousin who had died unmarried. Before Whitekirk came into his possession he had lived in a microscopic property in the upper ward of Lanarkshire, a place so hungry and so poor that it scarcely afforded bite and sup to him and

his only child. Yet the pride of his old lineage would not permit him to entertain the idea of work. He lived as a gentleman should, in his own eyes, and bore the straitness of existence, which often included an empty stomach, without a murmur. It engendered in him a Spartan endurance, and a contempt for the creature comforts, which, however, he had not been able to impart to his only child. She, unfortunately for herself, was a girl, and had never known a mother's care. When I saw her she was a woman grown, and fair to see. But my pen, weak at all times, will not essay the task of Peggy Brydone's description. Can we paint the lily, or catch the glint of sunlight in the pools, or make our own the lovelight that dances in a maiden's eye? No, truly; the attempt were better left unmade. One day she came into the office somewhat timidly and asked for Mr. Wedderburn. I had seen her come up the street in company with a tall man in the garb of a clergyman, and I had admired them as a goodly pair. He did not belong to any Edinburgh kirk, because I knew them all. But wherever he came from, he was a fine and noble-

looking fellow, who would make a name for himself in any kirk or in any town. I thought that they were much to each other, because her hand lay confidingly on his arm, and her sweet and witching eyes were often uplifted to his face with an adoring look. But both were troubled and uneasy in their minds—that was easy to read at a glance. It was the month of May, and the assemblies were in full swing; no doubt this would be the minister of her own parish. Such was my thought as they came together into the outer office. But why they should thus come together seeking lawyers' counsel was not so easily guessed.

"Is Mr. Wedderburn not in?" she asked, with an eager, troubled look.

"He is out of town to-day, and until Thursday, Miss Brydone," I answered.

She turned perplexedly to her companion.

"What are we to do, Archie?" she asked, with the prettiest troubled look. "It is impossible to wait till Thursday—at least, I would rather not."

"If there is anything I can do, Miss Brydone, I am ready," I said courteously.

At this she regarded me keenly, and her lips parted in a troubled sigh.

"We have no choice. Will you take us to a room, Mr. Lyall, where we can talk unobserved?"

I did so at once. All this time the minister had never spoken a word, yet he was neither shy nor embarrassed, though his face was grave enough.

"You must not call me Miss Brydone any more, Mr. Lyall," she said then with the loveliest smile. "I was married this morning. This is my husband, the Rev. Archibald Dempster."

I bowed quickly, and uttered a word of congratulation. Then Dempster spoke for the first time.

"I question if we are to be congratulated yet," he said. "I am in the worst fix ever a man was in—married to the woman I have loved hopelessly, as I thought, for years, but not sure whether I may call her mine or whether I have not done her a great and irreparable wrong."

"Oh no, that could never be," she said, folding her hands impulsively on his arm.

"But others may think so, dearest," he answered, looking down into her sweet face with a searching depth of tenderness which made his face yet more winning and attractive.

All this, of course, was very interesting and impressive, but it did not help me to any better understanding of their case. Presently they became conscious of my presence again, and the minister, looking me straight in the face, gave me the explanation for which I was waiting.

"You know, of course, that before Sir Alexander Brydone went to Whitekirk he lived in the parish of Aberton, in Lanarkshire, where I have been a minister for eight years. It was there that Miss Brydone and I learned to know and care for each other. We have borne the separation and estrangement ordered by her father as patiently as possible, sustained by the hope that some day his opposition to our union might be softened. We have dutifully observed his commands, neither writing nor trying to see each other; but when he tried to coerce her into a marriage with a man twice her age and unsuited to her in every way, we took the law into our

own hands, and were this morning married before the registrar."

"Then there is no more to be said," I observed, more interested in the story than I could have expressed.

"I am afraid there is a good deal more to be said, especially on Sir Alexander's side. My wife wishes to make sure of two things: first, whether our marriage is perfectly legal and indisputable; and second, whether her father has it in his power to disinherit her."

"I may answer both these questions in the affirmative, sir," I replied. "Fortunately the law on both points is simple. Your marriage is perfectly legal and unassailable. Whitekirk being an unentailed estate, Sir Alexander can will it where he pleases."

"Oh, do not imagine I care a fig about Whitekirk; I hate the place, it is as gloomy as the grave," said young Mrs. Dempster quickly. "There is nothing in the world I want except to go back to dear Aberton and live there all my days; but somebody has got to tell papa."

"Why, I shall tell him, of course," said Demp-

ster, as he drew himself up. "I have stolen a march upon him this morning, but I am not ashamed to defend my action before him or the whole world."

I recalled the face and figure of the old gentleman as I had seen him, a few days before, go fussing and fuming out of the office because Mr. Wedderburn had not agreed with him on some point under discussion, and I confess I did not envy the minister his task.

"Sir Alexander is in town, I think," I said lamely. "At least, he was here the other day."

"Why, of course," said young Mrs. Dempster, with the suspicion of a twinkle in her merry eye. "I walked out of his house this morning and met Mr. Dempster at the appointed place. Now I suppose we had better go back, dear, and get the earthquake over."

I was about to open the door for them when I heard the rattle of a cab on the stony pavement of the street. Looking through the window behind me, great was my astonishment and dismay to behold no less a person than Sir Alexander himself, and I saw very well from his red face

and blazing eyes that he was in a towering passion.

"There is Sir Alexander!" I exclaimed, and at these words his daughter grew very pale, and running to her husband, clung to his arm.

"Oh, let us go out quietly, even by some back entrance, Archie, if we cannot escape him any other way; I don't feel as if I could face him yet."

"You need not, I shall," said the young minister, drawing himself up.

"Pray excuse me a moment," I said hastily, as I heard Sir Alexander in tones of thunder inquiring why there was no one in the place to attend to his business. I had frequently seen him, both in his own house and in the office. There had been a great deal of law business over his succession, and I had even been sent once or twice to Whitekirk on Mr. Wedderburn's behalf, so that he knew me quite well, though he had never shown me much deference or consideration.

"Where is your master, young man?" he asked in his most rasping voice, and it seemed to me that his shaggy eyebrows met more fiercely than

ever, while the eyes themselves positively glared upon me.

"He's out of town, Sir Alexander," I replied suavely. "He has gone to Northumberland, and will not be back until Thursday."

"He's never at home. I'll change my man of business. There's no satisfaction in dealing with a gad-about who leaves his affairs in the hands of under-strappers. What am I to do? I have a matter of the gravest importance to discuss with him this morning, and a matter that cannot wait; do you hear that, young man?"

Here he brought his fist down on the waiting-room table with a force which capsized the ink-bottle, and sent a stream of ink across the clear surface of the blotting-pad, but in his rage Sir Alexander never saw it.

"A matter of life and death, do you hear?" he fumed. "My daughter whom you saw at Whitekirk the last time you were there has played me a pretty trick. She's run off this morning and married a parson, a parson; do you hear? and she could have had the pick of Galloway lairds; and not only a parson, but a canting, sneaking,

dissenting parson at that, do you hear? A Brydone of Whitekirk has married a Free Church parson; nothing much worse could happen, could it? and yet your master is not at home to advise me, but gadding about on other people's business instead of attending to his own."

I hesitated a moment. Many strange scenes had taken place in the inner sanctuary of my chief's room. More than once I had seen him act upon the moment's impulse, and in this way avert many a crisis, or at least turn it to the best account. Just a moment I hesitated, wondering how he would act under the circumstances, and whether I was justified in allowing the old man and his run-away daughter to meet.

"Why are you staring at me like a great blundering ass?" fumed Sir Alexander, getting redder in the face than ever. "They'll never make a lawyer of you, so the sooner you get back to your mother's apron string the better."

"Will you step into this room a moment, Sir Alexander, while I—while I consider?" It was no wonder I hesitated and faltered on the last words, for I was making a bold move, and the

consequences might be disastrous. Forgetting his rank and his pride, I almost pushed him into the inner room, and hastily closed both the inner door and the door in the passage, which shut them off entirely from the outer office. When both these doors were shut, no sound could reach those on the outside, unless, of course, some great uproar had taken place. I confess to a feeling of extreme nervousness, and my first impulse was to get out into the street, and thus escape the consequences of my own temerity; but that was impossible, since they might call me at any moment. I did not go back to my desk, but transacted imaginary business in the waiting-room for what appeared to be a long, long time, during which the silence was quite unbroken. At last, however, I gave a guilty start as I heard distinctly the handle of the inner door being turned.

"Are you there, young man?" called Sir Alexander's voice, and my ear was sharp enough to note that much, if not all, of the anger had gone out of it.

"Yes, Sir Alexander," I answered promptly,

and supposing that my presence was desired, I proceeded to the room where that momentous and exciting interview had taken place. That it had been a stormy and agitating one was evident. Young Mrs. Dempster was in tears, but not so utterly woe-begone and heart-broken as I expected. The minister was pale, and his lips twitched nervously, but he also had a happier look.

"They've got round me," said Sir Alexander grimly. "I suppose it's their spirit and their impudence together that have done it. Anyhow, there's nothing more to be said. They shall go back with me to Whitekirk this afternoon, and you can tell your master when he comes back that I am going to change my man of business for one that is to be found at home when he's wanted."

I only smiled, for I saw that the old man must vent himself on somebody, and my chief's back was broad enough; besides, what he did not hear would not hurt him.

"We shall always owe you a debt of gratitude, Mr. Lyall, and though we shall be very poor our-

selves and not likely ever to be very lucrative clients, we shall never have any lawyer but you, shall we, Archie?" said young Mrs. Dempster, with her winning smile.

"I don't think so, dear," the minister answered; and as he went out he wrung my hand and gave me a look which well repaid me for the little bit of business I had done on my own account. As is sometimes the case with domineering and tyrannical natures when brought to bay, Sir Alexander became quite mild and child-like where his daughter and son-in-law were concerned. It was a blow to his pride, of course, but he made the best of it, and though he never consented up to the day of his death to pay a visit to the Manse of Aberton, they were welcome to come and go to Whitekirk as they liked, and he took a surprising pride in the tall, handsome, curly-haired lad who would succeed his grandfather as Laird of Whitekirk.

"A SHOCK OF CORN—FULLY RIPE"

"A SHOCK OF CORN—FULLY RIPE"

THE Wedderburns were a strong family, both physically and mentally. During the years I was in the office in Castle Street, I never knew Mr. James to be absent one day from business through illness. So accustomed were we to his perfect health that I suppose we failed to observe certain signs which were easily read by those who only saw him occasionally.

One cold winter morning, however, as I saw him cross the Square with the collar of his fur coat turned up about his ears, and his shoulders bent forward as if they were no longer able to straighten themselves before the blast, it suddenly struck me, and that most painfully, that he had become an old man. I never took my eyes from his face and figure until he came to the office door, and then I noticed that his face was pale and

drawn as if by some inward pain. He was a man difficult to approach; I helped him off with his overcoat, making some casual remark about the bitter weather, but beyond bidding me the customary good-morning, he took no notice of my speech.

When I went to him an hour later to receive his instructions about his letters, the warmth of his comfortable room had evidently restored his vitality, for he looked more like himself, and some of the ruddy colour had stolen back to his face. But I found him most unusually languid, and even while dictating to me his thoughts seemed to wander, which made me wonder whether some more than usually perplexing case were troubling his mind.

"I'm not the man I was, Lyall," he said, suddenly bringing his hand down on his desk with a touch of impatience. "I think I shall have to send in my papers, and go on to the retired list."

"Oh, not yet, sir, surely," I made bold to say. "Perhaps you are a little out of sorts. Could you not get away for a month to the South of France or somewhere out of this weather?"

"Oh, I could, I daresay, but I don't feel that way, Lyall," he said. "I have never been one to coddle myself, and, besides, what would an old fogey like me do on the gay Mediterranean? It is for those who are surrounded by troops of friends. I am best at home."

"But you are not feeling very well, sir," I said then. "Have you seen a doctor?"

"Not yet. I'm putting off the evil day as long as possible, but I shall have to give in soon; there's something the matter somewhere, Lyall. I'm not the man I was, and I think myself it is serious mischief, past mending, in fact."

I regarded him in astonishment, not crediting his words. Even as I looked, however, I saw the colour pale from his cheek again, and his brows become drawn as if some spasm of pain had caught his breath.

"I'll go this very day, this afternoon, in fact, along to old Sir Thomas Leggatt. They say he's past his best, but his is still the one verdict I would accept. Now, get back to your desk."

So he dismissed me brusquely, as he often did, but I, whose understanding love had sharpened,

knew that that blunt speech was but the sheath of the tenderest heart. Little did I enjoy my work that day; the thought of my master's words blurred every page, and I am afraid that I scarcely earned my day's wage.

About three o'clock I saw him go out. I cannot describe my feelings as I watched him slowly cross the Square, and knock at the door of Sir Thomas Leggatt's house. Sir Thomas Leggatt was one of the old surgeons who had made the Edinburgh school famous, and though he had long retired from the active labour of his profession, he was still, in the eyes of many, the king of them all.

I was called away from my desk several times during the course of the next hour, and I did not see Mr. Wedderburn leave the surgeon's house, nor did he return to the office, which I, in my morbid anxiety, regarded as the worst possible sign. About half-past six, just as I was preparing to leave, one of the servants came up from the house in Heriot Row with a note for me. It contained only a few lines asking me to call after dinner, but not later than eight o'clock.

On the stroke of the hour I was at the door, and was at once shown into the library, where I found my chief sitting in an easy chair and wearing his dressing-gown. He had a small tray on a table at his side, with a glass of wine on it and a plate with some biscuits. From that I inferred that he had not dined, and I saw that he looked very tired, and older than he had looked in the morning.

"Well, did you get Halkett's deeds sent off, and did any papers come for me from Parliament House?"

"Yes, sir, they are all here. Captain Buchanan called in the afternoon, and was very much disappointed not to see you. He and Mrs. Buchanan are staying at the Roxburgh for a few days, and they will call to-morrow morning at half-past ten."

"I may not be there," he said quietly, as he ran his eye over the papers I handed him from my brief bag.

"That's all right. I'm glad that it has been satisfactorily settled; it was a ticklish job. Put away the bag and sit down, Lyall. Lock it in the

safe; there's the key. I've had enough of business for one day."

I did as I was bid, then took the chair to which he pointed me. He looked at me with a feeble glimmer of the old smile, which I used to think capable of representing a hundred varying moods.

"Well, I have been to Sir Thomas's, and he has given me my marching orders."

"What?" I exclaimed, and the actual horror I felt must have been written on my face. "Does he say there is something seriously wrong?"

"Fatally wrong," he answered tranquilly. "We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made. With all their skill and daring, operative surgery can only reach a certain point; anyhow, nothing can be done for me."

"And how long?" I stammered; and I know that my speech was thick, and my eyes dim with the shock he had given me.

"Oh, I didn't ask that. A few months, I suppose. I'll stick in to business till the last, anyhow, and die in harness. I must not complain, however. I have had a very fair innings. Next month I shall be seventy-one."

"Oh, impossible!" I cried, for I had always regarded him as in his ripe middle age; not a faculty was impaired; that day for the first time I had connected him with the languid incompetence of old age.

"That's a fact. I am seventy-one, and I have had a prosperous and fairly happy life, but a lonely one. My God! it has been lonely."

The concentrated passion with which he spoke held me in awe. It is ever thus; when the self-contained and the reticent open the flood-gates of their souls, we are carried away by it, as by a resistless tide. Speech was not possible to me, but I suppose my face was eloquent, yet truly I think for the moment he had forgotten me.

"When we are young and life is all before us, nothing greatly matters," he said musingly. "It is when we are old that we learn to adjust the scales, and to know what are the precious things of life. There is only one man I envy on earth, and it is he who has a wife, the dear companion of a lifetime, to comfort and sustain him when it comes to this. Listen, and I will tell you a story, a story which no mortal ear has ever heard, but

which has been locked in this breast for over forty years. Nearly half a century ago there were two friends at Edinburgh University, who were afterwards called to the Bar together, and who were as brothers in all things, although there was no tie of blood between them. All went well with them until both fell in love with the same woman. It was a fair fight, in which he won and I lost. I never bore him a grudge for that, but as the years went by a strange thing happened. The man whom I had loved and trusted, and whom I believed incapable of a single fault, turned upon the downward road and pursued it at a headlong pace." Looking me straight in the face, he mentioned the name of one of the most brilliant ornaments of the Scottish bench, but whose private character was as notorious as his public reputation was unique. He still lived, and his misdeeds had become memories of the past rather than present facts. "You understand now why I have never married, and why the richest joys of life are a sealed book to me. I do not know why I tell you this, except that I have taken to you, and you have been a comfort to me since the first day you

entered my office; but you will not breathe a word of this in another ear, Lyall. One word before you go: I hope that no such disappointment as mine will fall to your lot, but if it should, try and forget it and seek consolation in some other heart. When it comes to this, an old man without a woman's touch to comfort him is desolate indeed."

So he dismissed me to a sleepless night. Moved and stirred to the depths, I kept brooding on the pathetic story which he had told me, and marvelling over the blindness of the woman who had chosen the gilt and left the true gold behind. Soon after I saw the last page of that noble and useful life turned down for ever. During the months he lingered I was a great deal with him. For some weeks he continued to attend at Castle Street for part of each day, but very soon even that became a burden, and the day came when he did not seek to cross the threshold of his own door.

It may be that my long companionship with my grandfather had rendered a reverent consideration for age as second nature to me. It is

certain that, looking back upon my life, I count among my best and dearest friends men of twice my age.

It was my duty, as confidential clerk, to go down to the house every morning with the correspondence from the office, and even after he ceased to deal with it, and the active mind became languid and indifferent, I continued to spend a part of each day with him and many evenings. I was with him at the last. It was a matter of much thankfulness to the few who were admitted to that sick-room, that his suffering was less acute than we had at one time feared. The gradual decrease of strength, scarcely perceptible at first, was the only sign whereby we knew that his life was ebbing, and he was always bright and cheerful, going back very much upon the past, enriching me with his experience, which was often useful to me in after years.

During the last days he passed much of his time in drowsy unconsciousness, but when he woke up we were often surprised by the clearness of his mind, as well as by his unfailing cheerfulness. He was sustained by a boundless faith in

the Unseen. I do not suppose that in the whole course of his life he had wronged a human being. Many a good cause he had strengthened, and many a bad one bettered by his influence, and yet, although kept in full assurance of faith, he was always humble, and regretting that he had done so little to further the Kingdom he had at heart.

One boisterous afternoon in March, as I sat by his bed, he spoke to me suddenly, in a strong, clear voice which surprised me.

"David," he said—I was always David to him now—"I think this will be the last day. To-morrow I shall open my eyes on other scenes."

"Yet you look better than I have seen you look for some days," I said. He smiled, and shook his head.

"It is the blink before the storm, David. There is that in me that tells me the end has come. Now there are two things which I wish you to do for me. The first is to get pen and paper and write down what I shall tell you. I wish to be buried beside my sister in Warriston, and this is what I wish put upon the headstone below her name."

I did as directed, and wrote down his name and age and calling plainly from his dictation.

"I am not one for tombstone decoration," he said, with a glimmer of his old dry smile, "but below that I want you to write down these lines :—

'Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.'

Aye, David, that's what we must come to at the end, and happy is the man that can say it with his whole heart. That being done, all my affairs are in order; but there is one I should like to bid good-bye to. Will you go to Belgrave Place now and bring Mrs. Dalzell back with you?"

I lifted back the little table whereon I had been writing and went quietly out of the room. Hailing the first cab I saw, I drove to Lord Dalzell's house. His wife, however, was not at home. "Out driving," the servant said, and I left an urgent message for her to come to Heriot Row whenever she should return. I had not been many minutes back in Mr. Wedderburn's bedroom when she was announced. I sprang up hastily to leave the room, but he detained me.

"I wish you to see her, David; then you can go."

The door opened, and she came in—a tall and stately figure past middle life, a beautiful face, not old, although framed in hair as white as the driven snow. It was the face of a good and a noble woman, but one who had been through the waters of affliction, who had tasted almost every sorrow which can visit the human heart. He tried to raise himself in his bed and stretch out his frail hand to her. The expression on his face I shall never forget.

"I thought that you would not grudge me a word at parting, Mary," he said. "You have been nothing but Mary to me these five-and-forty years."

I saw her fall upon her knees beside him, and then I stole away, but not before I heard her whisper that she had made a bitter mistake. It may have been wrong for her to admit as much in her husband's lifetime, but it could do harm to none, and I knew that that last interview comforted the good man's heart as nothing else could have done; but what passed during the half hour

it lasted no human being ever knew. It was between themselves and their God.

I stayed with him that night. Again and again he thanked me for all I had done for him, and once called me his son. His thoughts seemed to wander much and to go back upon the long-ago time, and quite evidently memory had lost all sting. He died at the dawning with a smile upon his lips, and the grey and weather-beaten city awoke to learn that she had lost one of her best and truest sons. It has been my privilege to know many good men and true, but these two, James Wedderburn and Robert Wardrop, are bracketed together in my heart of hearts. A man who had been privileged to live intimately with them can never lose his faith in human kind, or believe other than this, that it is possible for the Kingdom of Heaven to be begun on earth.

ADAM BLAIR'S WOOING

ADAM BLAIR'S WOOING

IN every country village are born the lads who in the fulness of time go forth into the great world to make their mark there, and in every country village you will find the records of those great men sacredly cherished, memories of their childhood and youth kept green, and a pride in their achievements as tender as a mother's. There are also those who go out from the quiet places of the earth to achieve distinction of another sort, to become notorious instead of famous. Sometimes I think that in these days there is not sufficient distinction made between these words and their widely different meaning, and to that cheap notoriety, which is not worth any man's trouble to win or to keep, is given falsely the name of fame.

We in Faulds, I used to think, had scarcely

our fair share of fame in this respect. Many of the lads of the Dale went out, it is true, into the great world; but it is also true that but few of them obtained distinction there. Some of them, however, became very rich men, and made fortunes which became a proverb.

The story of one of these is what I have to tell. The mere record of how Adam Blair made his money would interest no man or woman. We will suppose it was made in the usual way by the exercise of prudence and forethought, by grasping every opportunity, and making opportunity where none was before. Yet there had been nothing in his upbringing to foster in Adam Blair the keen commercial spirit which he displayed in later life. He was a farmer's son, the third child of old Alexander Blair, of Ellon, a place which lay bonnily among the fertile haughs which sloped from the far side of Faulds parish right down to the sea.

He sat with me on the bench at Adam Fairweather's school, and there showed no special parts; in fact, he was slow and dull, and betrayed none of that interest in the classics which in the

old schoolmaster's opinion was the only pathway to success. When he left school he loitered about at home for a time, working on the farm lands of Ellon under his father's direction. Then suddenly we seemed to miss Adam Blair from the kirk and the evening school, and we learned that his uncle, who was a manufacturer in a small way of doing in the town of Dalswinton, had offered Adam a place in his office, and so in this commonplace and matter-of-fact way the making of Adam Blair's fortune began.

Dalswinton was a west-country town which few of us knew except by repute, nor were we at all clear in our minds concerning the special work carried on in Walter Blair's factory. As a matter of course he dealt chiefly in the making of carpets, but he was a man who plodded on quietly, leaving the great opportunities of his calling to be seized and made use of by others.

For a long time we heard and saw little of Adam Blair. He came home, of course, occasionally at New Year and other times to visit his parents at Ellon, and though we noticed that he was well grown and much improved in appear-

ance, there was nothing very distinguished-looking about him, nothing to betray that he had the making in him of one of the shrewdest capitalists that had ever bent his energies upon the amassing of great wealth. In fulness of time, when Adam was three-and-twenty years of age, his uncle died. He was a bachelor and childless, and no one was surprised when he left the whole concern to his clever nephew. Even at that early age Adam had inaugurated a new system of things in the old mill on the banks of the Swinton Water, and when he became master, with no one to say him nay, he was able to carry out the projects he had in his mind. The first thing he did, I have heard, was to dismiss the man who had been his uncle's manager, one who had been jealous all along of Adam's influence with the old man, and who was a dour, slow-going person, with whom Adam's ardent, go-ahead temperament had nothing in common. By-and-by we heard, too, in the ordinary course of things, that another of the Blairs had left Ellon to be with his brother at Dalswinton, and from time to time came rumours from the west of the go-ahead policy being pursued

by the young men and glowing accounts of their success.

And so the years flew by, and we, who had been boys together in Faulds school, entered one by one upon the stress of life, each one so engrossed with his own concerns that he had but little time to inquire into the affairs of others. I had not seen Adam Blair for fifteen years, and one Easter time, when I came down unexpectedly from London on a brief visit, I met him at Faulds station. For a minute I did not recognise him, he had changed so much. He could not be more than thirty-five, I knew, but his face had hardened, and the hair about his temples was quite grey.

"Adam Blair, isn't it?" I said cheerily, and he smiled as he extended his hand.

"I was just waiting to see whether you would speak," he said, and the voice was the pleasant voice of long ago. "Of course, I recognised you at once; you don't look a day older than when you went away."

At this I shook my head.

"I'm afraid I can't say the same of you, Adam," I answered. "You look like your own father."

"It's a harassing business, mine," he observed. "You've no idea what a lot it takes out of a man."

"You throw yourself too much into it, and give yourself too little diversion; isn't that it?"

Adam shook his head.

"Perhaps it is, David; but it's the only way to succeed nowadays. But sometimes I wish—although, perhaps, you will hardly believe it—that I had never left the fields of Ellon."

"And yet you have made a great fortune, they say, and are almost a millionaire."

"Oh no; I have done well, profiting chiefly by the folly of other men," he said, with a touch of bitterness. "By Jove, David, old Carlyle was right, men are mostly fools. But I hear you are married since I saw you last. Where is Mrs. Lyall?"

"She has gone to Aix with Mrs. Claude Innes for Easter. I am going to fetch her back after I have seen my aunt, who has been in failing health for some little time."

"You're one of the swells, David," said Adam Blair, with slightly uplifted brows. "As far as

that sort of ambition is concerned I might as well have been driving the harrows on the Ellon fields. Would you believe that I never cross the threshold of any man's door, nor does any man cross mine, except for business purposes."

"Then I'm sorry for you, Adam, my man," I said; "right sorry for you, and I'd rather break stones on the roadside and be able to extend a friendly hand to a neighbour, when I felt disposed."

"Ah, well, you see you're made different," answered Adam serenely. "I don't care. I've got used to my lonely life, and I'm quite happy in it."

"And how is Tom? Is he likeminded with you?"

"Not he," answered Adam, with a good deal of good-natured scorn. "He married when he was four and twenty, like the silly ass he was, and at thirty-four he has a big sma' family; ye can't get moved among them."

"But I could bet my boots that he's a happier man than you, Adam," I said bluntly, as we manfully faced the brae that rose steeply from Faulds railway station.

"He says he is; but how does he know? I've come to say good-bye to my folks. I'm going to Australia next month."

"To Australia!" I cried. "Business again?"

"Yes; the state of the wool market there is worth any man's attention. I'm just going to have a bit look round like, and I think I'll make it worth my while."

At this the lines on his brow seemed to deepen, and his shrewd eyes seemed to draw more closely together.

"Somebody wrote me that you had taken Katie Shiels and her mother from Ellon Burn, and given them something to do at your place," I said, glad to recur to the only kind act which I had ever heard laid to Adam Blair's charge.

Ellon Burn was a small holding marching with the wider lands of Ellon. On this poor place a widow and her one child had been left in great straits without a penny to their name, and I remembered that my Aunt Robina had written to say they had gone to Dalswinton Mill on Adam Blair's invitation.

"Oh yes," he answered indifferently. "Katie

is one of our forewomen, and a splendid hand she is. They're very comfortable; they live in a bit cottage not far from the mill, and are better off at least than they would have been at Ellon Burn."

"I haven't seen Katie for a long time," I ventured to say. "But I remember she was a bonnie lass."

"Trust you for taking notice of a bonnie face, David," he said with a huge laugh. "Now, I couldn't tell you whether Katie is bonnie or not. My only concern with her is that she does her work well."

"The loss is yours, my man," I said drily, "and maybe some day you will think on my words." And so we parted, and I thought no more of the matter; but I heard the story of Adam Blair's strange wooing long after from his own lips, when he owned that I was right.

After paying his always brief visit to his old home, Adam Blair went back to set his affairs in order before setting out on his Australian voyage. His passage was taken, and all his arrangements well forward. He had to spend

several days in London for business purposes before sailing, and he came into the mill one morning to bid them all a hasty good-bye. Katie Shiels, now a sweet, quiet, gentle woman of thirty, was employed in the designing department, where her clever fingers and artistic taste were of the utmost value. She was at her own desk in the corner of the women's room when the master entered and came directly up to her. Knowing Katie as he had done since his childhood, Adam Blair always called her Katie, and he had never noticed, what had been quite patent to others, that she never addressed him by any name at all, and that she was very reserved and even cold in her manner towards him. He was a kind and even a generous master to her, and she was not ungrateful, yet there was something—but there, I will allow the story to tell itself.

"Well, I am for off, Katie," he said, in his careless fashion. "See and behave yourself till I come back, and let me find you in the corner where I leave you to-day. I will be happy thinking of ye here when I am away." Now these words were uttered in the most casual way,

and at that moment meant nothing, yet Katie seemed to find them difficult to answer. It is certain anyhow that she never raised her head, and he stood regarding her perplexedly, wondering why she looked so downcast and sad.

"Everything will just go on in my absence as if I were at home, Katie," he said formally; "but I thought I'd like to tell you that I've made arrangements for your monthly cheque to be sent directly from the bank to your address; that'll prevent any trouble."

Katie knew quite well what he meant. Her salary was so far in excess of that received by any of the others that he had wisely thought in this way to prevent any friction in his absence.

"I'm very much obliged to you," she said stiffly.

"Well then, won't you shake hands and wish me a good voyage?" he said. She rose awkwardly from her seat and extended her hand, then she looked up. Her eyes were swimming in tears, which she could not have kept back if her life had depended on it.

"Why, bless me, Katie," said Adam Blair, and something tugged at his heartstrings which he could not understand. He gave her hand a limp shake, bade her good-bye confusedly, and departed from the place with most unceremonious haste. Katie Shiels did not do much more work that morning. She felt humiliated and ashamed of herself to have betrayed the faintest emotion before the man who was utterly indifferent to her. If she could have left the place upon any pretext whatever, she would have done so; but she was only a servant, and her time was not her own.

Adam Blair continued his round of the great works which had become so honourably associated with his name; but his heart and mind were in a whirl.

"David Lyall was right," he muttered to himself more than once. "I've been a fool, a fool all my days."

As Kate Shiels walked hastily along the riverside on her way back to her work after the dinner-hour, she was surprised to meet her master face to face. Her embarrassment and miserable feeling of humiliation had disappeared in the belief that

he had already entered upon the first stage of his journey. Her distress at this sudden sight of him could not be hidden.

"I thought you were away," she said, and her voice was distinctly ungracious.

"So I ought to have been. My train leaves Glasgow this afternoon at half-past two; but I doubt I won't catch it, Katie." There was a strange significance in his voice, and he stood against the trunk of a tree which stood directly in their path, fixing her with his grave and steady eyes, which there was no escaping. Katie stood before him, looking like a desperate creature who longed to escape, but did not know how.

"Katie, if it is possible that you care because I am going away, it is more than I deserve," said Adam Blair, in the humble tones of a man who has been brought face to face with himself for the first time. "I have been a fool and blind, grasping everything but the greatest gift of all lying to my hand. My eyes are opened. Will you marry me, Katie, and go with me to-morrow, or the next day, or any day you may fix?"

Katie shivered and shook her head. The

thought that she had betrayed herself was sore upon her.

"No; I will not," she answered. "You have made a mistake. Of course, I felt sorry at the thought of your going on that long journey, as one would feel over the absence of a benefactor such as you have been to my mother and to me; that is all. We'd better say good-bye here, Mr. Blair."

"No, by Heaven, I will not say good-bye in any such fashion!" cried Adam Blair, all the pent-up passion of a lifetime leaping to the surface. "My eyes are opened, and I know that I love you as my own soul, that I have always loved you. Oh, Katie, don't send me away. There is nothing I will not do to prove my love, my dear, if you will only take pity on my loneliness and come with me."

For a good half-hour he pleaded, and what more he said I know not, for he only told me the outline of the story. No doubt, however, my readers can guess. In the end he won, and there was a tremendous excitement in two parishes, one in the west and one in the south of Scotland,

over the marriage undertaken in haste but never repented at leisure. So Katie Shiels rose from being an obscure worker in the Dalswinton Mills to the position of a great lady, the wife of its owner. She married him in time to be his salvation, to save him from the withering and searing influence of the thirst for gold, and the terrible mania for commercial speculation, which is the ruin of so many. From these degradations Katie Shiels saved her husband by her tender and devoted love. She set before him in her own life and conduct an ideal so high that he was fain to follow it, if but feebly; and so Adam Blair, instead of becoming a selfish, narrow-minded, and unscrupulous capitalist, became a happy, generous-hearted philanthropist, who, in his public and private life, acknowledged his great wealth as but a trust from God.

THE WIFE'S PURSE

THE WIFE'S PURSE

THEY did not look like a newly-married couple, as they sat sedately in a third-class carriage, on one of the railway lines in the south of Scotland. She wore a gown of brown home-spun, neatly made, but without adornment, a closely-fitting jacket, and a bonnet of brown velvet, with a suspicion of pink on the brim, which gave the only youthful touch. She was thirty-five years of age; that was her wedding day, and she was now speeding towards her new home. The man who sat so quietly opposite to her belonged to the farmer class. He was a large man and loosely built, his suit of heather mixture new and fitting badly. It was an eye-sore indeed to the somewhat fastidious eye of his newly-made wife. She said nothing, but thought much. Indeed, in Kate Letham's mind were already

maturing a thousand plans for the outward reformation of Andrew, her husband. Of his inner integrity and honesty of purpose she had no doubt, else would she not now be sitting where she was. For her own future she had no fears, but she must dress him and teach him to make the most of his appearance. This thought gave an odd little touch of humour to her somewhat plain, grave face, which, however, was always redeemed by the winning pleasantness of her clear grey eyes.

Commonplace phrases do not come readily to the lips of persons in their position, and they could not speak of other matters because there were three passengers in the carriage with them. Kate had felt a little sore because Andrew had not put her into a first-class carriage. Such an idea, indeed, had never occurred to him; if it had, he would have dismissed it as suggesting needless waste.

As the train speeded through the rolling hills and valleys made sacred by the blood of the Covenant, Andrew Letham kept his eyes fixed on his paper, and strictly avoided even one

surreptitious glance in his wife's direction. To have shown her any special attention "afore folk" would have seemed to him at once unmanly and unseemly. Andrew's lack of courtesy, however, did not in the least trouble his wife. It would have troubled her much more had he pestered her with silly words and fond looks. She understood him, up to a certain point at least, and had no manner of doubt, as I said, regarding her future. They had been married at three o'clock that afternoon, in the house of Andrew Letham's cousin in Edinburgh, where they had first met. For fifteen years Kate Rutherford had been self-supporting at the business of dressmaking, and though, by reason of insufficient training, she had never been able to build up a first-class business, she had managed to make a comfortable living and to be independent. It had never occurred to her that she would be less independent in the sphere to which she was going.

It was a March evening, cold and boisterous, and when they alighted at the picturesque railway station at Lockerbie, Kate felt chilled and

weary, and glad to leave the cold shelter of the train. They stepped outside into a gently falling snow, which, however, seemed to have taken the keener edge off the bitter March wind. A high dog-cart driven by a slouching farm lad stood just without the enclosure, and up to the front seat Andrew Letham lifted his wife with a good deal of rugged care.

"What about my luggage, Andrew?" she asked, looking round doubtfully. "We can't take it in this."

"No, I'll send a cart for it in the morning. I thought ye said ye had all ye wanted in the bag."

"Oh yes, I'll manage till the morn," she answered. Then he sprang up beside her, the uncouth groom clambered on behind, and off they went. Andrew Letham had the reputation in the south country of being a little near, but in the matter of horseflesh he did not spare his coin. Kate enjoyed the rapid and easy motion with which they covered the five long miles to her new home, not dreaming that she sat behind a horse whose cost ran into three figures. It was now too dark for her to discern the full beauty of the

landscape through which they sped. The softly falling snow was casting its subtle, bewitching spell over hill and dale, and it spread a soft garment of beauty over the old house of Mearns, so that its new mistress was somewhat awed by its look. It had been some time the dwelling of the owners of the estate, and though it had fallen from that distinction to become a mere farm-house, its stately outline still remained.

It was a large, rambling, old-fashioned house, which, in the hands of persons of taste and discernment, could easily have been converted into a most picturesque and desirable home. In the old house of Mearns Andrew Letham had lived alone, save for the old servant who had ministered to his simple needs for over twenty years. He could have wed again and again, for he was a person of substance and of unblemished character, but he had pursued his solitary way untempted, until something in the bright, self-reliant, winning personality of Kate Rutherford had awakened him from his long indifference, and had at length given him courage to ask her to take pity on his lonely estate.

"What a big house it is, Andrew," she said as she walked into the large, bare, dimly-lighted stone hall. "Why, it looks as if it ought to be filled with ghosts." She gave a little shiver as she spoke, for in truth there was nothing there to raise the spirits of a new wife crossing the threshold of her home for the first time. It had never occurred to Andrew Letham that it would be necessary for him to brighten up the old house of Mearns for his wife, and when his cousin had suggested it to him, he had replied with a shake of his head,—

"I'll not be spending money, Grace, until I see if Kate wants anything done to the hoose. It will be time enough, when she sees it herself." Even Andrew himself was somewhat chilly struck that evening by the desolate and forlorn look of the place.

"Where's Barbara Wilson?" he cried, raising his voice intentionally so that she might hear, but no response came. "Just go into the parlour, Kate, or I see where the woman is," he added, pushing open the first door on the inner side of the passage. Kate walked into a small, some-

what stuffy sitting-room, furnished in shabby hair-cloth. A cheerful fire, however, lent some brightness and warmth to the place, while a small, badly-trimmed lamp in the middle of the table showed some preparations for the evening meal. Kate threw her shawls down on the sofa and kneeling on the bare hearth-rug, held out her hands to the cheerful blaze, oddly depressed by her home-coming, and yet trying to console herself with the thought that she could not expect anything else in a house where there had never been any women-folk. Meanwhile Andrew Letham had retired to the kitchen to interview Barbara, who, having been twenty years monarch of all she surveyed at Mearns, fiercely resented the intrusion of the mistress. A few stern words from her master, however, brought her to her senses, and she came in, though somewhat dourly, carrying a teapot in one hand, and a covered dish of ham and eggs in the other.

"This is my wife, Barbara," said Andrew Letham the moment when they came within the door. "Kate, this is Barbara. She is not an ill sort if ye dinna mind her sharp tongue."

Kate rose to her feet and extended her hand frankly to the somewhat ungracious Barbara. She knew from Andrew's cousin, Grace Barclay, that Barbara was a faithful soul, whom it might be to her interest to conciliate, so she spoke to her pleasantly, and her smile with its winning sweetness caused Barbara's dour face to relax, and she even unbent so far as to hope she had had a good journey.

"It's a pity we arrived in the dark and on sic an ill night, Kate," said Andrew when the door was closed upon them. "I think you will be pleased with the place when ye see it in daylight. It's a bonnie place, and the house is not that ill if it was sorted up a bit."

"It needs a lot of sorting, I'm thinking, Andrew," answered Kate, just a trifle drily. "Ye havena had much comfort here, my man."

When Kate had eaten a hearty meal and felt cheered and strengthened thereby, she was able to take a somewhat brighter view of her surroundings, and with a lighted candle she accompanied her husband through the house, which was only partly furnished, and that but poorly. She

said nothing that night, but her head was full of plans which would have surprised her husband had they been laid before him. Kate knew from Grace Barclay that Andrew, if not exactly a rich man, was very well-to-do, and she had no intention of allowing his money to lie unused at the bank. At least a certain amount of comfort she would insist upon having in the house; but she was a prudent person, who would do nothing rashly, so she allowed a good many days to pass before she even hinted at what was in her mind.

"Now, Andrew," she said one day, "when can you spare a day to go to Edinburgh with me? I want a lot of things for the house, and I could choose them better, of course, if you were with me."

"What kind of things, Kate?" he asked anxiously. "It's not that bad, the house as it is, and what's the use of furnishing a lot of rooms to look at? A body can only be in one room at one time, Kate."

"That's true," answered Kate quietly, "but you never expected me to be pleased with the

house as it is, Andrew. I never said anything about it before we were married, because, of course, I wanted to see for myself what was needed."

"Well, then, tell me what you think *is* needed?" he asked.

"Oh dear, where am I to begin?" she cried. "The first thing we want is to send to Lockerbie for the painters to make the place clean, before we put any new furniture into it. I don't think there has been a ceiling white-washed in it since you were born. Then it's a whole new dining-room's furniture I want, and a bedroom, and a new stair carpet, and some things to stand in that great bare hall. It's nothing better than a barn, Andrew, and would give anybody the shivers to go into it. If you will buy or let me order all that, I'll get the curtains and the small things myself, and you'll see what a house should be like."

At this somewhat large order Andrew Letham stood aghast.

"But, Kate," he said, "ye must ca' canny and mind that I am not a nabob. How much will

a' that cost? That's the first thing to be considered."

"Oh, cost! well, maybe two hundred pounds. It might be done on a hundred and fifty, but it's good things I want, and no trash."

It was impossible for Andrew Letham to conceal his dismay at this announcement. He still stood somewhat in awe, however, of the bright, brave, winsome woman he had married, so he did not at once utter all that was in his mind.

"That's a heap o' money, Kate," he said, shaking his head, "and times are not what they were. If you wait till after harvest, maybe I could do it, but not just now."

Kate Letham bit her lip, and for a moment the bright tears were perilously near her eyes.

"But it's now, Andrew, I want it," she said, "before everybody comes to make their calls. Do ye want to make a fool o' your own wife, that ye pretended to think such a heap of?"

"It'll be you they come to see, Kate," he said pawkily, "and not the house."

"Aye, but they'll see the house in the bye-gaun," she said quickly, "and if I can't get it

made decent before they begin to come, I will not open the door to a single soul o' them, so there! I'm not going to be the laughing-stock of the whole countryside."

Andrew Letham regarded her perplexedly, stroking his bare chin reflectively. Kate had begun her improving of the outward man by making him shave off his ugly and ill-kept beard, a change which had made his face so much younger and so much handsomer that he had been surprised himself. Detecting some sign of relenting in his eye, she walked over to his side, and laid her hand coaxingly on his shoulder. They were a very sensible pair, not much given to endearments or foolish talk, but her touch was still an electric touch to Andrew Letham, and the colour rose hotly in his cheek.

"Now look me in the face, Andrew Letham," she said quietly, yet with the merry twinkle in her eye which had been the first thing to attract him, "look me in the face and tell me whether you can afford this money or not. If you say honestly, mind, that ye can't afford it, I will never say another word, but will be doing with

the house as it is, and make the best of it; but if you've got the money, I mean to hae the furniture, so there!"

"I've got the money, of course, Kate," he said reluctantly. He was an honest soul, and could not shuffle or prevaricate one hair's breadth to save his life. "But what I think is, that it's needless. I've lived all my days in Mearns, and never felt that it needed anything."

"Ah, but I'm different," she made answer. "Just you wait or you see what I can do. I am proud of my man, and I will be of my house, when I'm done with it, and I want to show them off to the best advantage. So you'll take me to Lockerbie the morn, and I'll see the painter."

Kate had it all her own way in the matter of the house arrangement. Two hundred pounds was actually spent upon it, although the spending was sore upon Andrew Letham. He was bound to say, however, that the end justified the means, and he comforted himself by thinking that it would only be one expenditure, because the things would certainly last them all their days. Now, though Kate had gotten her own way in

the matter of the house-furnishing, it must not be supposed that her troubles were over—nay, she found them but beginning, a thousand petty troubles which she could not, or would not, have spoken of to a living soul. Yet very real troubles they were, the little stings which robbed her of the full zest of life. Andrew Letham was indeed a very near man, and in household affairs even miserly. Kate had freely spent all her small savings to assist in the adornment of her new home, and when it was finished she found herself penniless and with no means of earning a shilling. She was too proud to ask from her husband the money he did not offer. The farm produce, of course, supplied a large part of the needs of the household; other things were obtained from the Lockerbie tradespeople, with whom Andrew ran what was called "contra accounts," so that Kate did not even have the pleasure of handling the money with which these were paid. It did not occur to Andrew Letham that the lack of money could be any privation to his wife. He had his own ideas about the position and privileges belonging to his own sex, but had he been asked

what was the position and privileges of the other sex, his answer might have been instructive, although it could not have been palatable, to Kate at least. He thought that women had no use for money, and that the less they had in their possession the better, seeing that few of them knew how to spend it judiciously. Therefore, although he loved his wife with a strong, silent devotion which grew in intensity day by day, he kept her in a state of absolute poverty. She had not even a penny to buy a postage stamp. Stamps were kept in one of the drawers in Andrew's desk, which stood in one corner of the parlour, and she was allowed to help herself, but the lid of his cash-box was locked. Now Kate was one of the most delightful women in the world to live with. She was healthy in body and healthy in mind, and had a bright, happy disposition. But, like most high-spirited and generous persons, she was proud and perhaps inordinately sensitive, so she suffered a long time in silence, and Andrew, to do him justice, had not the slightest idea that there was anything amiss. What made it harder for Kate was the fact that outside no expense

was spared, no outlay grudged. In the Mearns stables there was nothing but the most valuable horseflesh, and the farm implements were of the latest and most expensive kind. So a year went by, and she nursed her slow indignation until it began seriously to injure her health, and even threatened to undermine her happiness too.

One day the light dawned upon Andrew Letham; at least, it was flashed upon him in a most unexpected fashion. He came into the house one morning in the month of May, to find Kate lying full length on the sofa, with her head buried in the pillow. He had come up from the field to get his letters, as he was expecting the returns for some cattle he had sent to one of the southern markets.

"What's the matter, Kate?" he asked, aghast at sight of his wife in this unaccustomed attitude, for she was always bright in the morning and active in the duties of the house, but she never moved nor spoke. Then a great fear clutched at Andrew Letham's heart, and striding to the side of the sofa, he took her somewhat roughly by the shoulder.

"Leave me alone," she said, in a voice which he had never before heard.

"What is it, Kate?" he asked. "Are ye ill, or have I done ought to offend ye, or have ye had bad news by the post?"

"It's all three, if ye will have it," she cried, and sitting up suddenly, she faced him with a bitterness in her eyes which surprised him. "I'm not ill in body, so ye needna look that concerned," she said, "but I'm ill in my mind, and I never will be better while I live here a pauper, for I'm nothing else."

Andrew Letham sat down on the edge of the table, too much surprised to speak. For the moment, indeed, he could think nothing but that Kate had gone out of her mind.

"What are ye talking about, lassie? ye must have had bad news by the post. Tell me what it is."

"I've had some news by the post, certainly. It's only from some folk that were kind to me once when I was in need; they're in need now, and I havena a penny I could send to them, nor even a postage stamp o' my ain by which I can send a kind word to them."

"I dinna ken what ye mean, Kate," said Andrew Letham helplessly. "If ye want money, you will get it. How much do ye want?"

"Oh, go away; don't put such a question to me. I'll tell ye what I want if ye like," she added suddenly, and flashing upon him a terrible bright glance from her dry eyes. "I want all ye have, to do what I like with, to spend as I like, and if ye canna give me that, Andrew Letham, then you and I have made a mistake, and the sooner I go back to my business, where I was my ain mistress, and always had a penny in my pocket, the better it will be for us baith."

"Mercy upon us, Kate, hae ye taen leave o' your senses?"

"No, but you've got to come to yours, my man, where your wife's concerned, and that speedily," she observed quietly. "I'm in earnest. I'm nae better than a beggar or a bairn here, where I should be mistress, Andrew, an' I would change places wi' Barbara Wilson or any bondager in the place, for they at least hae their wages, but me—I hae naething."

"Naething, Kate! what's mine is yours," said

Andrew, completely dumbfoundered by this unexpected outburst.

"Is't? a bonnie story! where's the key o' the cash-box? I have never seen it. How much siller have you in the bank? I dinna ken. Whether is the farm payin' or losin'? Answer me these questions truly, my man; an' if ye winna, what better am I to ye than a name? I'm nae wife to you. I'm your hoosekeeper that gets her meat and her claes for her pains. I'm tired o' it, an' I'm gaun away."

With this Kate, womanlike, lost her brave front and burst into foolish tears, which was a sight to render Andrew Letham desperate. To do him justice, he had never given the matter a thought; and being busy with other things, had imagined, because his wife made no complaint, she was entirely happy and contented. He sat down on the sofa beside her, and with all the awkwardness of one not accustomed to the rôle of comforter tried to clear matters up.

"I'm vexed to see ye so putten aboot, lass, an' if ye will tell me what ye want, it shall be done. There's the key o' the cash-box, an' if

I ever touch it again, my name's no Andrew Letham."

"I want the cash-box left open, an' I want a cheque-book o' my ain, Andrew, for I've aye had it, an' I miss it sair. If you will let me spend as I like for a twelvemonth, then I will give ye leave to shut the purse-strings again if ye like. What for can ye not trust me? Do ye think I'm a bairn or a fule that thinks a halfpenny would burn a hole in her pocket?"

"I never thocht aboot it at a', lass," answered Andrew quietly, which was indeed the kernel of the whole matter. "Ye werena in earnest, Kate, when ye said ye wad leave," he added, and Kate could hardly repress a smile, for she saw that it was a matter of desperate moment to him. And with such a weapon in her hands, she could do much.

"Me leave! do ye think it likely?" she asked saucily, and she laid her bright face against his shoulder. "But if I'm worth anything at all, I'm worth that much, Andrew. It's your trust I want as weel as your love."

"Ye hae baith, lass, as ye shall see," said

Andrew, with an unusual burst of affection, and for the next ten minutes the sober, middle-aged pair were as foolish-fond as lovers in their teens. They did not live in uninterrupted bliss and unity from that moment; it is not so easy for persons of mature habit and strong individuality to suppress these characteristics entirely, but it is certain that that was their last serious difference regarding money matters. Andrew was as good as his word, and when they held their committee of ways and means at the stipulated time, he very willingly admitted that his wife had not betrayed his trust.

HIS BROTHER'S WIFE

HIS BROTHER'S WIFE

IT was a summer morning, and the rich promise of the harvest lay upon the land; as far as the eye could reach it was gladdened by the rich waves of the yellowing corn. Leaning over the five-barred gate of one of his own fields, Alan Brydon, farmer in Rubislaw, surveyed the landscape with the deep satisfaction of a man who knows that he has not laboured for naught, and that when the time of harvest should be full there would be enough and to spare for man and beast. He looked like a prosperous, well-to-do, contented man, albeit he was a lonely one. He was already getting into middle life, but he had never married, and lived alone in the house of Rubislaw, his own fault entirely, since it is certain he could have wed almost where he chose. His name was held in

high repute in the Dale, not only as a man of substance and standing, but by reason of the sterling qualities of head and heart distinguishing him. He was goodly to look at also, and the hair whitening a little at the temples in no way detracted from the charm of his face. He was forty-three years of age, but he did not look his years, save for those grey hairs, of which he was proud. He was very careful and fastidious in his dress, and even in his working hours was never seen in the disreputable garb affected by some of his brother farmers; for this reason, and perhaps because he lived a somewhat austere and retired life, some called him proud, but those who knew Alan Brydon well loved him, and would have trusted him to the uttermost ends of the earth.

Brydon was an old name in the Dale. There had always been Brydons in Rubislaw, which had originally been part of the unentailed estate of Inneshall. From a spendthrift scion of Inneshall, Alan Brydon's father had purchased Rubislaw, so that Alan Brydon could write himself Laird as well as tenant of the place. It was not a great

estate, only two hundred acres, but these were the choicest acres in the Dale. In the sixties and the early seventies, which were the palmy years of agriculture, a very comfortable little fortune had been amassed by Alan Brydon. He was a careful man himself, simple in his tastes, living with almost austere frugality in the plain square two-storey house facing the high-road to Upkeith, the house in which still stood the furniture which old Alan Brydon had chosen for his wife. Yet in outside matters, especially where a helping hand was needed to those in distress, even though that distress followed upon some fault of their own, Alan Brydon was generous in the extreme. The Reverend Patrick Ellon, then the minister of Faulds, and a warm friend of Alan Brydon, never had to appeal to him in vain ; so by reason of his good deeds, his clean, wholesome life, and his prosperity, Alan Brydon was in the main a contented, if sometimes a lonely man.

As he stood at his gate that fair summer morning, waiting for the old postman to bring him his letters, his mind was entirely occupied with thoughts of his one brother, who had been some-

thing of a prodigal in his youth, and, like many another prodigal, had been shipped across the seas to prevent public disgrace from falling upon the name he bore. In the country of his adoption, Alexander, or Sandy Brydon, as he was familiarly called, had redeemed his character. He had been fortunate enough to be attracted on the steamer by the sweet and good woman who afterwards became his wife, and with her had settled down to sheep-farming in Queensland, and had done well. He wrote regularly to his brother in Scotland, and of late there had been some talk of his coming home with his wife and two children to see the old country once more. For several days Alan Brydon had thought without ceasing about Sandy, and always with a wistful yearning which had something of pain in it, but it had not prepared him for the bad news which was presently brought to him by his old friend Andrew Service, who had carried the letters to the house of Rubislaw for over twenty years. When he saw the thin foreign-looking envelope with its broad black border, his heart seemed to stand still, and he could scarcely steady his voice to

bid Andrew Service his customary "good-morning." He saw at a glance that his sister-in-law's writing was on the envelope, and with trembling hand and parched lips he broke the seal, and read the pathetic words it contained. It was not a long letter, but simply announced Alexander Brydon's sudden death through an accident while breaking in a young horse. It was a pathetic letter, written by a woman whose heart was almost at the breaking point.

When the first shock of his grief was over, and Alan Brydon read the letter again, he discovered more in it than he at first observed, a consuming anxiety on Lilias Brydon's part concerning the future of herself and her two little children. That night the world seemed a changed world to Alan Brydon. He could think of nothing but the long-ago time, when he and Sandy had been boys together roaming the fields and woods, never out of mischief, but happy as the day was long, and with never the shadow of a cloud or misunderstanding between them. For Sandy Brydon had been no man's enemy but his own, and his faults were those of a frank, guileless, generous nature,

which lacked strength of will to guide its impulses in the right direction.

He cabled a word of sympathy to the sister-in-law he had never seen, and then sat down to write a letter to her, which was indeed the most difficult task he had ever essayed in his life. That done, he could only wait for further developments. They came in rather a sudden and unexpected manner. The next week's mail brought a second letter more bulky than the first. It contained some closely written sheets from Lilias Brydon, setting down in detail the condition in which her husband had left his affairs. Evidently they could not have been worse, and though during the last five years they had managed to live comfortably on their station, continual droughts and consequent mortality among their stock had swallowed up all their capital, and it transpired that Alexander Brydon had left little behind him but his debts. Enclosed with this long and melancholy epistle was a short letter written by Sandy himself the day before his death. It was a strange letter, evidently from the hand of a man who believed that his days were numbered. It

was in reality a passionate appeal to Alan to stretch out a helping hand to his wife and children, and it awakened in Alan Brydon's heart a strange awe, which made him feel almost as if he had been in touch with the Unseen.

His reply to this epistle was prompt and decisive. He simply cabled to her to start out for England at once, and at the same time cabled to one of the Brisbane banks to provide her passage money. Then he could only wait patiently until the seven or eight weeks should pass before she could arrive.

One day in the late September, the Reverend Patrick Ellon called at Rubislaw about eight o'clock in the evening. He knew all that Alan Brydon had done concerning his brother's widow, nd the object of his present call was really to ascertain when she was likely to arrive at Rubislaw.

"She will be here to-morrow likely," Alan said, when the minister put the question after they had shaken hands.

"And are you going to keep her here indefinitely?" asked the minister. "I'm afraid you'll

find it a bit irksome, never having been accustomed to any womenfolk about you except Christina Rattray. By the bye, what is Teenie saying about it?"

"Oh, she is as pleased as I am at the prospect of seeing poor Sandy's wife and bairns," answered Alan quietly. "But I have thought about what you say, and I have made a plan. I thought if Lilias liked the place—Faulds I mean—and thought she could bide in it, I would take that house of James Glover's on the Pit Braden road for her; then I could have the bairns under my own eye, and see to their education and the like."

"A very good plan; but if she is English born, and always been accustomed to a kindly climate, Alan, I doubt if she will like Faulds. It's a bad time of the year to try it."

"Oh, but I think she's a sensible woman and will ken on which side her bread is buttered," said Alan drily. "Anyhow, she will stop here until the term; then if she prefers Edinburgh, Edinburgh it can be. It's not that long to the term now, Ellon, only seven weeks."

"Perhaps you'll find it long enough. It will be a great change to you," said the minister, and he looked round the plain, sombre dining-room, so essentially a man's room, and thought what a great innovation a woman and two small children would seem in it. "I thought you would have gone to London to meet her," was his next remark.

"Well, I did think of it, but I was so busy with the harvest and one thing and another, I couldn't manage it, and it seemed a needless expense."

At this the minister smiled. That was Alan's way, lavishly generous with the pounds, but studiously careful in the expenditure of shillings, which indeed, they say, is the foundation upon which wealth is built.

"Well, perhaps you are right, and you have saved the long journey down."

"Helloa, Murdo, what ails you?" The collie, stretched before the blazing fire, never unwelcome in the long, chill autumn nights, gave a low growl, and got up shaking himself uneasily, and with that there came a distinct roll of wheels

on the gravel sweep outside, and something stopped at the door. "That's a cab," cried Alan, as he leapt to his feet. "While I'm waiting on the telegram, I believe they've arrived."

He hurried out to the door to find his surmise correct. The first sound that fell upon his ears, as he threw it open, was the shrill, sweet tone of a child's voice.

"Oh, mummy, it is dark! Why doesn't Uncle Alan have all the gases lighted at his house?" And the next moment it seemed they were all inside the house, the two sunny-faced children, the sturdy little boy his father's living image, and the sweet, fragile-looking little Lily equally like her mother. It was the mother in whom for the moment Alan Brydon was the more interested. She seemed at first sight to be very tall, and when she took the heavy wrap from off her shoulders, very slender. She was totally unlike the woman Alan Brydon's imagination had pictured, totally unlike the woman whom his brother Sandy would have fancied, or, stranger still, who could have fancied Sandy.

She had a most distinguished bearing, which

struck even the minister. In trying to describe her afterwards, he said she had the look and manners of a queen; but withal her face was singularly sweet, her whole manner entirely womanly, and at that moment full of pathos. There was a wistful questioning look in her eyes as she extended her hand to her husband's brother. On him her own happiness and the future of her children must depend. There was nothing to repel or to discourage in that kind, noble face. Patrick Ellon, standing in the background, wondered that he had never before noticed the winning beauty in the face of his friend.

"You are so like your brother," Lilias Brydon said at length. "Oh, Alan, because of that I feel that I have come home."

Then the children clung about his knees, having been taught from their infancy to love their Uncle Alan, and to speak of him as one whom they should certainly see one day. No recognition was necessary; he had simply appeared before them in the flesh, the realization of all their childish dreams. He lifted them in his strong

arms one by one and held them, unable to speak, because his heart was full. After all, there is something in the tie of kinship sweeter than all else.

Patrick Ellon saw that at that moment he was forgotten, and without waiting for the introduction which he should claim later on, he slipped quietly out by the door, and went back to his own fireside.

In the old house of Rubislaw, Lilias Brydon settled down as if it was the home of her heart. She was a desolate creature, without kith or kin on the face of the earth, and though her husband had never ceased to talk of his brother Alan in glowing terms, she only now seemed to realize that his highest praise had failed to do justice to the character of Alan Brydon. For he was strong where his brother had been weak, and with the great strength and the invincible integrity of his nature, there was the heart of a little child, the considerateness and unselfishness of a woman.

As the days sped, Lilias Brydon more and more marvelled that Alan had never taken a

wife to himself, for surely never was man more fitted to make woman happy. They settled down, as I said, as though they had been born in the old house of Rubislaw, making a place for themselves, and yet without seeming to disturb even in the smallest degree the harmony and the quiet of the house. Even Teenie Rattray, who had feared, and in her inmost soul somewhat resented, the prospect of such an upheaval in the house, in a week's time felt the sunshine of their presence, and wondered how she had suffered the old dull, empty days.

Many long talks Alan Brydon had with his sister-in-law, and it seemed to him that never had he arrived at a more just and correct estimate of his brother's character. She had loved him dearly. Evidently their married life had been ideally happy, but at the same time he saw that the faults of his character had not been hid from her, only her large and gracious charity and her sweet womanliness had been able to cover them up, and to bring only what was noblest and best to the surface. Without doubt the later years of Sandy Brydon's life had been redeemed by a

woman's love, and he had gone to his account without a misgiving or a doubt, taught by her that God is more merciful than man.

In household ways Lilias was all a woman should be, thoroughly capable and yet so quiet and unobtrusive that though her influence permeated all, there was no jarring note. So in a dream of quiet restfulness and happy companionship the days went by. The term came and went. The empty house on the Pit Braden road was suffered to fall into the hands of another tenant. Christmas came and went also, promise of seed-time and harvest was fulfilled again, and then at the second Christmas time came a great awakening. During these happy months the little household had so grown together that they were as one. Never in the three and forty years of his life had Alan Brydon known what happiness meant, and so he lived in a fool's paradise, not guessing, or at least not admitting the truth, until his eyes were opened to it by Patrick Ellon, his faithful friend.

On a boisterous night in the month of December, a year after Lilias Brydon came to Rubis-

law, the minister came along the Upkeith road with a long swinging stride, and his face in the darkness wore an anxious and troubled look. He passed by his own manse, and held on towards the farm, but before he reached the familiar white gates there was the rattle of wheels behind him, and Alan Brydon's gig came along the middle of the muddy road. The minister stood still on the side path, and drew an unmistakable breath of relief when he saw that his friend was quite alone.

"Good-evening, Alan," he called out in his cheery voice, and immediately Alan Brydon drew the horse up sharp.

"Halloa! Were you going to the house? Jump in."

"Yes, I was, but it's hardly worth while. I'll just walk to the gate. I want a word with you, Alan, a word in your private ear."

"All right, old man. I'll be glad of your company. I've been down to Upkeith to meet Mrs. Brydon, who has been to Edinburgh for the day, but she sent me a wire at the station that she was detained until to-morrow."

The minister said nothing, but walked on to the house, and waited inside the porch at the front door until Alan had given the trap to the groom and joined him.

"Come in and have a bit of supper with me. I shall be very glad of your company," repeated Alan, with more than usual warmth. Still Patrick Ellon said nothing, but his face preserved its grave look.

"I have been at a christening at the other side of the parish this afternoon, Alan," said the minister, as they drew their chairs up to the cosy hearth, and prepared for a friendly chat. "I called in at Easterlaw as I came over the hills, and something that was said by Mrs. Haldane has given me a bad half-hour, Alan, and I couldn't sleep until I saw you about it."

"Ay, what was that?" asked Alan Brydon, interestedly enough, though not exhibiting any signs of supreme curiosity.

"It was something about you, Alan, and it's not the first time I have heard it either. Can't you guess?"

A strange, slow flush mounted Alan Brydon's

white temples, and he exhibited other signs of confusion, which were not lost upon the keen eye of Patrick Ellon.

"How can I guess?" he asked, almost roughly. "I'm not in the way of hearing all the gossip of the countryside."

"It would be a good thing if you heard more of it, and paid heed to it, Alan," said the minister drily. "It's you they are talking about at present, you and your brother's wife. She'll have to leave Rubislaw, Alan, if you are to save your own good name and hers."

Alan Brydon laid his pipe down, and rose to his feet, looking very white.

"My God, Patrick, what is it you are saying? That they are talking about her and me, and saying any ill of us, is that what you mean?"

"That is precisely what I do mean," said the minister with a nod. "You have been very reckless in your open devotion to her, and I have been remiss indeed not to have warned you before."

"But she's my brother's widow, almost my sister," cried Alan desperately, "and it only shows

the wickedness of people's imaginations when they would gossip evilly about two innocent people."

"I grant you that, Alan, but it is true also that there is seldom smoke without some fire. Can you look me in the face and say that the regard you have for your sister-in-law is a brother's regard?"

"No, God help me, I can't," answered Alan Brydon, and with that he sank into his chair, and with a groan covered his face with his hands. Patrick Ellon regarded him with a long, mournful, affectionate gaze. It was a terrible situation and a hopeless one.

"Why have you not been warned by your own feelings long ago? It's the proximity that does it. She's such a winning, attractive woman, that it would be impossible for any man to live in the same house with her day by day without feeling the magnetism of her presence. If only you had been wise enough to put your first plan into execution, and had settled her in a house of her own."

Alan Brydon listened, but said no word. What

his suffering was in that moment none ever knew, for the man who has lived four and forty years of his life without any outlet for his affections is not likely to bestow them lightly. In that moment of sudden and terrible revelation Alan Brydon went down into the Gethsemane of human anguish, where no man could follow or help him.

"We can only hope," said the minister, in a low voice, "that she has no suspicion of this, and you will be wise to set about getting a house for her immediately, the further away the better."

"She has no suspicion of it; God forbid that she should, Patrick," said Alan Brydon, as he rose heavily to his feet. "Will you not misunderstand if I ask you to leave me now? I have got a battle to fight in which even you cannot help me."

"I can pray for you, friend," said the minister, and his strong human sympathy even then sank into Alan Brydon's heart and gave some balm to his hurt. "And whatever happens, I know that you will act the part of a Christian and a gentleman."

So they parted. Alan Brydon sat down alone

by his hearth to face and fight the matter out. When Christina Rattray bade him to his supper, he took no heed, and when he did rise at length, instead of entering the dining-room where the meal was laid, he walked slowly, and with a step which seemed to drag wearily, upstairs to the room where the children slept.

The rain had now ceased, and the wind fallen, and a radiant moon was riding somewhat defiantly across the stormy sky. A broad beam of light from an uncurtained window fell right across the two little beds, where the children lay with the seal of heavenly innocence upon their brows, their sweet lips parted as the breath came softly and easily, almost with a smile, as if they held some converse with the heavenly place. Down upon his knees beside the little ones whom he loved, Alan Brydon sobbed in his strong anguish, but the sound had no power to disturb the sleep guarded by the angels.

The sleepless night with the long conflict, which left its mark upon his body, yet gave him a strange strength for the ordeal of the day. Late in the afternoon Lilias Brydon returned to Rubis-

law full of winsome apology for her delay, and making no secret of her joy to be back again.

"I felt so disappointed when you did not meet me at Upkeith, Alan," she said when they met at tea. "Oh, I am so glad that I do not live in Edinburgh; it is all very well for a day or two when one has to do the inevitable shopping, but I am so glad to get home."

He hesitated a moment, for the sight of her radiant face was more than he could bear. Suddenly she looked up from her study of the Christmas parcels on the table, missing something in his greeting, and then she was struck by the extreme pallor of his face.

"Why, you are ill, Alan," she cried at length. "Tell me what it is. If I come back to find you like this, I shall never, never go away again."

Alan Brydon turned away, and the beads of perspiration stood upon his brow. How to give a natural aspect to the suggestion he was bound in honour to make? She must leave Rubislaw, and that without delay, but to tell her so in the very teeth of her joy at returning to its roof was a task beyond him.

"I shall think I have offended you by staying away so long if you look at me so strangely," she said lightly. "Come and look at these things I have brought for the bairns. Do you think they will like them?"

He walked from the window to the side of the table where she stood; to be near her, to feel the contact of her dress, made his pulses beat, and the blood course quicker through his veins. She, all unconscious, bent over the pretty toys, handling them daintily, and with all a mother's interest in what she knew would give pleasure to the mind of her child.

"Just a moment, Alan, for I think I hear them on the stairs, and they must not see them. Don't you think it is important to keep up the illusions of babyhood? They believe implicitly in Santa Claus. I shall be sorry when that belief disappears."

She raised her head presently, wondering at his most unusual silence. He was always so interested and so ready to discuss even trifling matters, but something in his manner chilled her. The sudden flash of her grey eyes upon his face

banished all his stern resolves, and he had no power to hide from her the secret of his soul. A look of terror gathered in hers. She felt as if the foundations of all things were slipping from her, and yet underneath all was a subtle overpowering sense of sweetness and joy which she knew, all too well, could have but one meaning. She gathered the frail trifles on the table in her arms, and turned from him with a wan, faltering smile.

"The children," was all she said, and so left him, but not before he read in her eyes also not only that she understood, but that her heart was his, wholly and unalterably. That night late in the Manse of Faulds two men, friends whom time and circumstances had proved, sat talking of this terrible thing which had come into the life of one. What they said I may not here set down. It would take too long, and would not materially assist my tale. Another sleepless night Alan Brydon passed, and in a distant part of the house Lilias kept a lonely vigil too, a vigil without hope.

Next morning Alan Brydon breakfasted alone; at least, he sat at the table, but nothing passed

his lips. Christina Rattray knew that something had happened, but could think of nothing but that they had quarrelled, though that was unlikely enough.

"Is Mrs. Brydon up yet, Teenie?" her master asked when she came to remove the things.

"Ay, sir, long syne. Oh, sir, what has happened? she's packin' up. Surely she's no to leave; if she is, I'll be leavin' too."

"I'll see. A terrible thing has happened, Teenie, and only God knows what the end will be," said Alan Brydon, and strode upstairs. A small room next to the nursery Lilias Brydon had fitted up as a sitting-room for herself, and there he found her surrounded, as Teenie had said, by preparations for departure. Her face was very white, but it seemed to pale yet further when she saw him come within the door.

"Put down these things, Lilias, and turn your head," he said, and in his voice there was no note of wavering. "We've got to face this thing, God help us, and see what is the best to be done."

"There is no best," she answered, and the soft cadence had gone out of her voice, and left it

only shrill and harsh. "There is only one thing to be done. I shall be gone before nightfall."

"And is that to be the end, Lilias, for you and for me?"

"Oh, don't torture me," she cried. "Am I not tortured enough by my sin, by my faithlessness to my husband's memory? I am shamed before my children."

"There is no sin," he answered. "Before God I say it; you are my brother's widow, it is true; that brought us first together. It is only the law of man that parts us; the law of God will not and does not."

"But the Prayer-Book," she said falteringly.

"The Prayer-Book is the work of human hands. Lilias, let us go where the law will permit us to be husband and wife. That is what Ellon advises us to do. He knows that we cannot be happy apart."

"Did Mr. Ellon say that, and he a clergyman?" she asked in a puzzled voice.

"He did. We sat far into the night. I told him everything. He knows, because he has suffered, that it is an awful thing for a man come

to my time of life to learn to love. Why should we live apart? You are a lone woman, I have no sib to care whether I live or die. The bairns——" here his voice broke and the unbidden tears sprang. "I will be guid to the bairns; who has a better right to father them than I? and sure am I that Sandy where he is this day would wish this thing to be."

"You are talking of a marriage, aren't you, between you and me? I have never thought of it. How can it be made possible?"

"Only by leaving Scotland. I'll let or sell Rubislaw, Lilias, and buy a place abroad. We can be married there, and live our lives as usefully as here."

"Would you do all this for me, Alan?" she asked, and on her face there was the wistfulness of a child. He crossed the room and took her in his arms, and no man could blame him.

"I would make an exile of you, Alan, and I would fear it," she said when she had put him from her. "I know from Sandy how the Scotch love their own land. It made him sick and sorry many a day because he was an exile."

"But I would have you, Lilias, and where you are is my home," he answered back.

"But is it right? would God approve? and then I must think of the bairns. Oh, Alan, we must do nothing that would vex them for their mother, when they are old enough to understand. And you are so honoured and so useful here. Maybe God requires of us that we should bear this bitterness alone. At least you must let me go away for a time until I can think it all over—a year at least—and we must do nothing rashly."

"It shall be as you say, Lilias, but I will be of the same mind at the end of one year, aye, and at the end of ten."

"A year, then, and all the time I will ask God to show me the right way," she said, and the strength of her religious feelings surprised him. She was not one to speak of these deep things, though she carried the spirit of them into her daily life.

She had her way. Next day she left Faulds, and went far south to a watering-place on the coast of England, and Alan Brydon remained at Rubislaw alone, and that year of probation was

a time of searching for him which made him a better man. There was much talk in the place, though Alan Brydon kept his own counsel close, as did Patrick Ellon, his friend. At the close of the year Rubislaw was sold, and Alan Brydon left the home of his boyhood and his native parish, aye, the very land that bore him, for ever. Let none think it was a sacrifice lightly made, or that it cost him naught. Had he felt it less, he had not been the man we knew him to be. Patrick Ellon, faithful to the last, and believing that God would bless the marriage unblessed by man, accompanied his friend abroad, and there saw him wed to the woman of his choice. Whether it was a right step or a wrong step I say not, these things be too deep for me, only I know that the two who took it never regretted it, and that the happiness which was theirs had no sting. They ordered their lives in the strange new land of their adoption as humble and devoted servants of the Lord, and were more useful to their generation together than they could have been apart.

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